



THE INDEPENDENT

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WEATHER: Cold everywhere

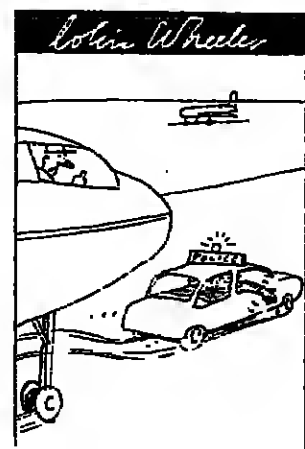
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Buildings to knock down for the millenium PAGE 20



Sixties style to die for



Pilots and air controllers to be tested for drink

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

The police are to be given new powers to test pilots, air-traffic controllers and maintenance engineers for alcohol and drug abuse.

The Department of Transport initiative comes after concerns that aviation workers, including 41,000 commercial and private pilots, may be operating while under the influence of drink or drugs. At present the police have no power to breathalyse

or take a blood sample from a pilot or air-traffic controller.

A limit of about 21mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood will be used - equivalent to about one glass of wine or half a pint of lager - which is effectively a zero tolerance level.

The DoT has yet to finalise the details but they have told police chiefs that they intend to introduce the changes later in the year.

Drinking is thought to be a bigger problem than drug-taking in the aviation world, which can involve ex-

treame pressure and long hours. A DoT consultative paper says: "The CAA [Civil Aviation Authority] believe that alcohol is a contributory factor in a number of aircraft accidents each year. However, the true scope of the problem is hard to assess in the absence of testing."

At any one time, between 40 and 50 professional pilots are being counselled by the CAA for alcohol related problems. Since 1976 there have been nine known cases where pilots were drunk while flying a light aircraft

- in four they crashed and were killed. There have been two known incidents involving drunken commercial pilots, although both were prevented from flying. In the past eight years the CAA has been notified of eight cases of drug use, all involving cannabis.

The new powers are to target Britain's 29,000 private pilots, 11,800 commercial pilots, 1,900 air-traffic controllers and 15,000 maintenance engineers. They have been prompted by the need to comply with a European Union directive which

requires all member countries to ensure that by April 1999 flight crews do not work with more than 21mg of alcohol to 100ml blood.

Police officers are expected to use their new powers in two key areas - when they attend an air accident and believe that a person has been drinking or taking drugs, and when they believe that an offence is about to be committed, for example if a pilot has been drinking in a bar shortly before an aircraft takes off. Random testing will not take place.

Peter Sharpe, Chief Constable of Hertfordshire and head of the Association of Chief Police Officers, said: "At the moment we cannot take a breath test unless the subject agrees voluntarily. We believe the new power will be useful to help deal with allegations or accidents where alcohol is believed to be involved."

A DoT spokesman said: "It seems odd that there is no limit at the moment. It will be some time before there is any announcement."

Doctors reveal NHS is failing

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

The National Health Service is in the midst of a winter crisis of delays to operations and ward and hospital closures, according to a leaked paper drawn up for doctors' leaders yesterday.

Labour called for an emergency Commons statement from the Secretary of State for Health, Stephen Dorrell, as Britain experienced snow and freezing conditions, with accident and emergency centres across Britain reporting rapid increases in demand, leaving many stretched to the limit and some unable to cope.

Hospitals are telling GPs not to refer any more patients until April when money comes available for the next financial year.

In response, some GPs are advising patients to refer themselves to accident departments. The flu epidemic has also added to the strain on the NHS, with more patients and staff going down sick at the busiest times.

The crisis is certain to become part of the general election battle. Labour have guaranteed to match the £1.2bn increase for the NHS next year, but have refused to make pledges about more money for future years.

BMA sources said they believed the crisis was probably the worst to hit the NHS in a decade.

Although it was made worse by the flu epidemic, the core problem, doctors believe, is a chronic shortage of resources, in spite of an extra £25m injected into the health service on Christmas eve by Mr Dorrell to try to avert a crisis.

Chris Smith, shadow Health Secretary, said the report made "chilling reading". And he added: "It shows that, whatever the claims made by the Government, the reality is a health service under massive pressure, beset by funding difficulties and slipping into crisis."

The BMA is seeking an urgent meeting with Mr Dorrell on the findings of its national survey. The report showed: Nottingham - Queens Medical Centre: Doctors instructed to admit only urgent surgical cases and those who have been

waiting for 18 months for treatment, the limit under the Government's Patient's Charter.

Wales: Four major hospitals closed to non-emergency cases because of the winter weather and flu epidemic.

South London: 24 patients waiting on trolleys in Accident and Emergency in the early morning, with no prospect of being admitted until the afternoon at the earliest.

East London: No elective surgery or routine work until after April 1997 outside the three Tower Hamlets hospitals (Homerton, Royal, and Newham) to improve financial viability of these three trusts by referring all cases to them.

Leeds: no more elective gynaecology work for next few months. Bed crises mean that beds in specialist units have to be borrowed for emergencies.

North Staffordshire Trust: A&E department - admissions and sickness forced a consultant to work without a break for 36 hours from Monday morning to 2 pm on Tuesday.

The cuts in elective treatments are also having a "major impact" on medical students in training. The chairman of the medical students committee started a three-week placement at Barts/Royal London to find paediatric A&E and other wards closed.

A BMA spokesman said: "We are taking it very seriously. Last October we warned that the light was at amber and if it got worse, it would be at red. The red lights are now on."

"People are waiting in ambulances because there are no beds. In Nottingham, the shortages are in crisis proportions. Letters have gone out virtually stopping everything."

"We are getting reports from of crisis in other parts of the country almost daily."

Gerry Malone, the Health Minister, said last night: "We anticipated the harsh winter and that is why we implemented a plan of action and provided additional money for extra services."

"It is nonsensical for the Labour Party to complain about funding when they won't match the Prime Minister's pledge of year on year increased spending on the NHS."



Blockade threat in Med's missile crisis

Tony Barber
Europe Editor

Turkey threatened yesterday to blockade Cyprus and even launch a military strike if the island's internationally recognised Greek Cypriot government went ahead with a widely criticised plan to deploy Russian anti-aircraft missiles. "Those who play with fire have to take responsibility for their actions," said Turkey's Defence Minister, Turhan Thynn.

"We are strongly against these missiles going to the island. We will use all our capabilities to prevent it," he added.

The Cyprus government announced last weekend that it was buying the S-300 Russian surface-to-air missile system as a way of neutralising Turkey's long-held air superiority over the island. The deal was immediately criticised by the United States and Britain as likely to inflame tensions on Cyprus, a former British colony that has been forcibly divided into Greek and Turkish sectors since 1974.

In the last few days, the missile crisis has blown up into Europe's most serious risk of international confrontation for many years. This has coincided with a separate Greek-Turkish row over the ownership of disputed islands in the Aegean Sea.

Mr Thynn compared the Cyprus crisis with events in Cuba in 1962, when the US blocked the island in response to the Soviet deployment of missiles there. But Turkey's state-run Anatolian news agency went further and suggested that the Turkish armed forces would launch a military strike against the missiles after Russia had delivered them.

Greek Cypriot officials last night tried to play down the crisis, saying there was no fixed date for the deployment of the missiles, and that their purchase was intended primarily to refocus international attention on the need to solve the Cyprus dispute.

The island has been divided into a Greek Cypriot south and a Turkish-occupied north since 1974, when Turkish forces invaded Cyprus in response to a pro-Greek coup aimed at unit-

ing the island with Greece. Greece's Prime Minister, Costas Karamanlis, appeared unconcerned about the threats.

Turkish aggression has been expressed for some time. We would be playing Turkey's game if we showed particular worry over this and were swept into an atmosphere of crisis," he said.

Prospects for cooling the situation depend heavily on a senior US diplomat, Carey Cavanaugh, who is to visit Cyprus, Greece and Turkey from next Sunday. He is expected to urge steps to lower the risk of conflict, including limits on Greek and Turkish military overflights of Cyprus.

The Foreign Minister, Malcolm Rifkind, appealed to the Cyprus government last month not to buy the missiles, saying the island was already one of the most dangerously militarised places on earth. But the Greek Cypriots retorted that the basic problems remained the presence of 30,000 Turkish troops and the existence of a rogue Turkish Cypriot state that is recognised only by Turkey.

Enough Euro-sceptics on all sides to thwart such a manoeuvre.

The government's only option, therefore, is to trim its spending yet further, which could threaten the economy and throw thousands more out of work. The opposition is not likely to watch that spectacle with folded arms.

One way out would be to allow a referendum on the euro. But Chancellor Kohl has ruled that out, arguing that referendums were far too Weimarian.

German job crisis, page 23



Neave inquiry
A third social worker involved in the case of Rikki Neave, 6, and his family was suspended as a result of a strongly criticised Cambridgeshire County Council's care of the murdered boy and his family.

Sinatra in hospital
Frank Sinatra was taken to hospital in Los Angeles after an apparent heart attack. The singer, 81, was in hospital two months ago for eight days with a pinched nerve and mild pneumonia.

CONTENTS

<i>The Broadsheet</i>	
Business & City	22-24
Comment	19-21
Foreign News	10-16
Gazette	18
Home News	2-9
Leading Articles, Letters	19
Shares	25
Sport	27-30
Unit Trusts	26
<i>The Tailwind</i>	
Arts Reviews	19
Classical	16-18
Crossword	22
Features	2-9
Listings	20, 21
Rock/Pop	10-14
TV & Radio	23, 24
Weather	22



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Germany's worst jobless rate since 1932

Barbara Karas
Berlin

Germany is on course for busting the Maastricht limits this year, burying the European Monetary Union under a mountain of government debt. As unemployment soared again last month to a post-Weimar peak, matching the rate in 1932 shortly before Hitler came to power, official statistics released yesterday showed that economic growth was faltering.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl has pinned his hope on a growth rate of 2.5 per cent this year, which might have been just enough to keep the budget deficit under the 3 per cent permitted by the Maastricht treaty. But, according to the latest figures, the economy is not growing at all, and may even experience a mini-recession this winter.

Growth is set to resume in the summer, but economists predict it will not be enough to make up for the shortfall. Leading institutes have revised their

forecast to 2 per cent, which would force the government to overshoot its budget ceiling. If it does, it will be the third year in a row that Germany has failed to meet the standards it had itself set for member states of the currency union. This is the final year for applicants to put their house in order, and Mr Kohl has pledged that there will be no tinkering with the criteria.

The final decision rests, ironically, with the Bundesbank and the German parliament. While the central bank might be inclined to turn a blind eye, there are

enough Euro-sceptics on all sides to thwart such a manoeuvre.

The government's only option, therefore, is to trim its spending yet further, which could threaten the economy and throw thousands more out of work. The opposition is not likely to watch that spectacle with folded arms.

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news

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There are many reasons to buy education: now we know you can buy exam grades

Judith Judd
Education Editor

Parents choose to buy education for their children for many reasons. Sometimes it is family tradition, smaller classes and more individual tuition; perhaps there is an element of social cachet or snobbery.

They hope their children will also get better examination results, and yesterday came evidence that indeed they do - even if they don't deserve them.

A report from government exam advisers found that A-level English examiners awarded candidates from top fee-paying schools higher grades than they deserved. Its findings mean that some of the 5,000 candi-

dates involved, almost all from fee-paying schools, may have secured university places which would otherwise have gone to comprehensive school pupils, Dr Nick Tate, the authority's chief executive, admitted.

The report is the most damning indictment of the conduct of an exam ever seen by officials at the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. Candidates examined by the board included students from Winchester, Eton and King's College School, Wimbledon.

Overall, 60,000 candidates took A-level English. The report reveals that some of those entered with the Oxford and Cambridge Schools Exam Board last summer had their marks in-

creased, not on the basis of what they had written, but because of the grade predictions made by their teachers. Exam boards use predictions to help sort out high discrepancies in marks.

Dr Tate said the examiners in this case made a number of changes, which might amount to as much as two grades, without even looking at the scripts. Instead, they relied on teacher predictions, knowledge of the schools and of individual examiners. He said: "The way the exam process was conducted was unworthy of a reputable examining board."

"There is no evidence of collusion between the schools and the board but there is evidence of overgenerosity. Teachers'

grade predictions are a bit of information to be taken into account but they should not be the main factor."

The upgrading took place at the end of the exam process. In virtually all cases, the report says, the upgrading was unjustified. "In one instance the marks given to a candidate who had produced extremely brief responses had been changed from 14 out of 60 to 40 out of 60 with no apparent justification."

The board's chief examiner in English, Dr John Saunders, who headed an 11-strong team, resigned last July. He said he was protesting against the imposition of new marking rules which penalised gifted candidates.

Last night, he said: "The no-

tion that we are going to give Eton everything we want is completely untrue."

"This report is a slur on people of high integrity and professional experience. There was no upgrading of candidates on the basis of teachers' predictions alone."

A spokesman for the Independent Schools Information Service said: "There's no evidence of partiality to independent school candidates. The fact that the majority of candidates taking this syllabus were from independent schools is an historical accident."

The board, which has merged with another and is now the Oxford and Cambridge Examinations and Assessment Council,

said a new team of senior examiners had been appointed for English and measures put in place to prevent a repetition of last summer's events.

Dr Tate has asked the board to ensure that similar problems are not occurring in other subjects. The authority scrutinises about 10 per cent of exam syllabuses each year.

John Dunford, former president of the Secondary Heads Association and head of Durham Johnston School, in Durham, said: "I am appalled that my students may have been put at a disadvantage by this process. Candidates from one sector have been given an advantage in the competitive world of university admissions."

significant shorts

Boy, 15, falls through ice and dies

A teenage boy died yesterday after falling through ice on a pond. Peter Sinclair, 15, of Stevenston, Ayrshire, and his next-door-neighbour, John Wales, 13, had been trying to retrieve golf balls at Auchinbarvie golf course when Peter ventured out on to the ice and fell through.

Six pensioners who were golfing shouted at him to try and swim to an island but as he tried to clamber back on the ice, he slipped back in and disappeared.

Firefighters were swiftly on the scene and one who went to save the boy said he probably slipped to his death less than a minute before they arrived. Charles Bell, dressed only in standard firefighting kit, waded up to his neck but failed to find him. His body was retrieved later.

Burned-out Mirren wants to quit

Helen Mirren plans to quit acting because she is "sick" of being driven by ambition, she said last night. The *Prime Suspect* star is thinking of spending the rest of her days quietly in the English countryside painting landscapes.

"I want to retire quite soon. I do not think I want my career to go on and on," she said in an interview with the comedian Ruby Wax. "I'm sick of the ambition, I'm so sick of the continual feeling of frustration, thinking 'am I doing it right? I'm not doing it right, I'm terrible. I want to live in the English countryside and paint bad pictures of horrible little landscapes'."

Mirren, who now lives in the US, was attending the premiere in London last night of *Some Mother's Son*, an account of the 1981 Maze Prison hunger strikes.

Plan to tempt tired heads

Burnt-out head teachers who seek early retirement could be encouraged to return to teaching until they reach 60 under proposals from their local authority employers.

The move would allow heads who no longer wanted the pressure of running a school the chance to stay on at work under less stressful conditions while also saving on pensions payments, the Local Government Education Employers said yesterday.

The suggestion is part of a package of measures aimed at cutting the growing bill for teachers' pensions. In exchange for accepting some concessions, the authorities want Gillian Shephard, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, to delay the introduction of new pensions rules from Easter until next September, though that is considered unlikely. There are fears that there will be an exodus of older staff before the deadline. *Lucy Ward*

Abortion risk dismissed

Having an abortion does not increase a woman's chances of developing breast cancer, according to a "meta-analysis" of studies covering nearly 281,000 Danish women. The findings, reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, contradict claims made last October by four US scientists - three of them vocal opponents of abortion - to have found "overwhelming" evidence that women who terminate a pregnancy face an increased risk of breast cancer. *Charles Arthur*

£40m Oxford school rejected

Controversial proposals to build a £40m business school on an Oxford University playing field were yesterday ruled out by university authorities two months after a parliament of dons voted against the scheme. Wafic Said, the Syrian-born entrepreneur offering half the cash for the project, has laid down a deadline of June this year for the university to find an alternative city-centre site. *Lucy Ward*

Tonsil test for CJD

Doctors may be able to make an early diagnosis of the new strain of the brain disorder Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) by examining tonsil tissue, using a new test devised by British scientists.

The "new variant" of CJD, which is thought to be caused by eating food contaminated with BSE, or mad cow disease, has so far affected 15 people in the UK.

Previously, the diagnosis has had to be made after death or by a brain biopsy, which is expensive and can be dangerous to the patient.

The new test, reported in the *Lancet*, follows work by John Collinge at St Mary's Medical School in London and the CJD Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh. *Charles Arthur*

Child hangs

A 12-year-old boy died after being found hanging at his home, an inquest was told yesterday. David Tack of Upton St Leonards, near Gloucester, was taken to hospital, but attempts to revive him failed. The inquest was adjourned.

Snake squad

Blackadder, the television anti-hero played by Rowan Atkinson, was adopted by the Army's Combat Service Support Group. Every soldier in it will wear "a wriggly black adder".



At ease: The Prince of Wales talking to Leading Wren Paula Trewin of HMS Illustrious on his visit to Portsmouth yesterday when he presented the Wilkinson Sword of Peace to the captains of two Royal Navy ships, the Illustrious and HMS Invincible. Photograph: Neil Munns/PA

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Whitehall accused of sabotaging openness

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

New civil service codes of conduct for the release of public information were attacked as "too restrictive" yesterday by the Campaign for Freedom of Information.

The codes will make it more difficult for the Ombudsman to investigate in environmental cases, including the high charges for information relating to the BSE "mad cow" disease, and a total blanket has been thrown over information relating to MI5.

A member of the public was told he would have to pay over £6,000 under John Major's

Open Government proposals if he insisting in demanding information about the handling of "mad cow" disease by renderers and incinerators.

The high price of information was seen last night by the Campaign for Freedom of Information (CFI) as further evidence of the way that Whitehall is breaking the spirit of the Prime Minister's drive to make Government more open.

The Ministry of Agriculture told Alan Watson, from Gower, South Wales, that the information would cost £1,393. But the ministry might have to seek legal advice, which could push the cost by £5,195.

When Mr Watson, a civil en-

gineer, complained to CFI in London, they took up his case with the ombudsman. But a new code of practice issued yesterday by Roger Freeman, the Cabinet minister with responsibility for the civil service, has made it worse.

Maurice Frankel, director of the CFI, said: "Until now, the ombudsman could ask for information covered by the code of practice and he would be able to challenge it. But under the new code, that remedy has been removed."

The Government presented the codes as a modest tidying up measure, but the CFI believes that in the small print, they have tightened up the restrictions.

Dead husband is to father twins

As a woman is fertilised by her late partner's sperm, experts say the law is confused, writes Liz Hunt

A woman is expecting twins following a controversial form of fertility treatment which used sperm from her husband extracted before he died of cancer.

The use of posthumous frozen sperm after cancer treatment is well-established, but success rates are low. Scientists say that a treatment, known as ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection), in which sperm is injected directly into the egg, offers a far greater chance of a viable pregnancy in these cases.

The case, reported in the *British Medical Journal*, comes as Diane Blood, whose battle to have her dead husband's child has won widespread support of doctors and the public, announced she will take her case

to the Court of Appeal on Monday. Mrs Blood, 31, whose husband slipped into a coma and died of meningitis before giving written permission for his sperm to be used, is challenging a ruling by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) - subsequently upheld by the High Court - not to let her have fertility treatment here or abroad.

Mrs Blood's father, Michael McMahon, yesterday said his daughter had been advised by lawyers that she had a good legal case. She will be claiming the rulings were unreasonable, and that her rights under Euro-

pean law superseded British legal restrictions. She will also argue that when the sperm sample was taken from her husband he was still alive, and written consent should not have been necessary. Mr McMahon said: "She is very, very optimistic now, but at the same time she is terrified of losing at this stage. It means so much to her."

Doctors and scientists from London, Swansea, and Tynes and Wear, involved in the twin pregnancy in the 36-year-old woman whose husband died of testicular cancer, say that a comparison of this and the Blood case shows the "limita-

tion of the law as it stands. They say that sperm collected from an unconscious man - which the HFEA permits - cannot ever be used for treatment unless he recovers. Written consent is needed prior to use of the sperm in fertility treatments.

"As shown by our case, the HFEA is not opposed to posthumous assisted reproduction provided written consent is obtained. But death is seldom convenient," the doctors write. "The comparison of the two cases shows the limitation of the current law; it is inconveniently applicable in a chronic illness

but not so in an acute illness. Such inflexibility is germane to neither the human condition nor a rapidly changing medical field."

In the same issue of the *BMJ*, Professor Sir Douglas Black, former chief scientist to the Department of Health, describes the decision to refuse Mrs Blood treatment, as "corporate tyranny."

He writes: "It seems to me that this is a case in which the distress and hardship to an individual are glaringly obvious, and the value to society - minimal. That view presupposes that legal and ethical principles are contingent, and not absolute, and that need to be defended at whatever cost to actual living people."

صكتا من الالام

news

The Rikki Neave inquiry: Family and union demand public investigation after consultancy's study is condemned as superficial

Catalogue of errors that led to death

Glenda Cooper

Rikki Neave was "failed" by Cambridgeshire social services, a damning report found yesterday, prompting fresh calls for a public inquiry into his case.

Six-year-old Rikki was found strangled on the Welland estate in Peterborough in November 1994 following years of abuse by his mother, Ruth. She was found not guilty of his murder last November but failed for seven years for cruelty to him and her two daughters.

Rikki's family, who were not consulted over the independent report by the Bridge child-care consultancy, said they would be writing to the junior health minister Simon Burns urging a more wide-ranging investigation.

And Unison, which represents social workers, said the report was "nowhere near" the thorough, independent inquiry that Cambridgeshire County Council had promised. Yesterday a third social services worker involved in Rikki's care was suspended.

The report found blunders over missing files, lack of communication and confusion as to whether Rikki was on the at-risk register.

While social workers repeatedly found Ruth Neave aggressive, threatening and hostile the inquiry noted that "it does not appear that the question was ever addressed about how the children experienced her care".

Staff also failed to take into account what the children said. When



Rikki Neave, who was found dead in 1994, and his mother, Ruth

they did perceive that there was a problem all too often prevention methods were incomplete. And although his name was placed on the Child Protection Register there was no evidence of any comprehensive assessment. The missing files were investigated by po-

lice and the files that did remain were sparse and rarely read.

The 29 recommendations included the need to seek children's views; the establishment of a risk policy; support for social workers where a parent is aggressive; and a new formula for allocating resources for child protection.

Janet Lindsay-German, one of the report's authors, said: "Social workers, their managers and the department failed to recognise what was going on for Rikki at home ... One of the most important things for us is that lessons that have been outlined time after time are still not being practised."

The chief executive of Cambridgeshire council, Gordon Lister, acknowledged the "quality of services provided for Rikki Neave ... fell below acceptable levels."

But Mr Lister said he did not anticipate any further suspensions and made clear he would not consider resigning. Challenged that frontline social workers had been scapegoated he replied: "The buck stops right at the top in this case."

But Rikki's family - including his father, Trevor Harvey, and his grandparents, Maurice and Doris Harvey - later said: "Most of the recommendations ... merely suggest that the local authority should comply more fully with the child care protection regulations."

"We now find it necessary to write to the Simon Burns ... to invite him to consider a formal public inquiry so that the wider issues can be properly investigated."



The report's author Janet Lindsay-German and county social services chief Ted Unsworth in Cambridge yesterday Photograph: Andrew Buerman

The boy who was left out in the cold

Glenda Cooper

At three years old, Rikki Neave was already being turned out of his house at midnight, in his pyjamas, barefoot, and left to cry until social services were called. Neighbours told of his mother Ruth dangle him screaming over a bridge by his legs, writing "idiot" in green felt tip pen on his forehead and squirting washing-up liquid in his mouth.

Before his body was found, strangled, in a corpse near his home in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, two years ago, Rikki's six-year life was marked by repeated acts of cruelty by his mother.

At a trial last autumn, she was found not guilty of his murder but was sentenced to seven years for the "appalling ill-treatment and neglect" she had shown to Rikki and her daughters which caused the judge, Mr Justice Poplewell, to say he had "rarely come across a case of such persistent and systematic cruelty to young children".

The trial also raised questions about the failure of social services to deal with the family.

Ruth Neave's problems were well known. She had shown signs of being disturbed from an early age, and had been in and out of foster homes since the age of two, rejected by her parents, who killed themselves in a suicide pact when she was 24.

Addiction to amphetamines further destabilised her and she became increasingly preoccupied with the occult.

It was an unstable atmosphere for any child. Described by neighbours as a "little bugger" and a "real hardknock", Rikki had seen father figures come and go. He and his stepfather, Dean Neave, with whom his mother was besotted, hated each other, and Rikki became the butt of much of Ruth Neave's cruelty. She kicked her son "like a football", picked him up by the throat, punched him and sent him out at night to fetch drugs.

In a series of letters to Dean, Ruth Neave wrote: "I have hurt [Rikki] with a match ... I have punched his little face in. I just want to kill him ... but I cannot."

Neave's everyday actions should have proved more worrying to social services. But the Peterborough East team which covered the Welland estate, with its high unemployment and many single-parent households, was said by insiders to be "close to collapse".

"In the months before Rikki died, morale was low as staff complained of huge workloads, many of them handling 15 cases at a time."

"They felt overworked and under-resourced and were going from day to day by the seat of their pants," said one council official. "No one ever got hold of it."

Children caught in poverty trap

Michael Streeter

Children are suffering the most from the growing gap between rich and poor in Britain, which is helping to make the role of social workers almost impossible, according to a leading academic.

Professor Jane Lewis, a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, claims the growth in child poverty is so serious it means Britain will have difficulty implementing Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This concerns the "right of children to a standard of living adequate for children's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development".

Professor Lewis, director of the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, and writing in *Community Care* magazine on the day that the Rikki Neave report was published, says social workers were having to pick up the pieces from other parts of the welfare state.

She said that the rising number of children excluded from school and the greater number of sick people cared for by social services rather than by the medical profession meant social services were "very much the

end of the line". Social work was always difficult in a liberal democracy, when social controls conflict with personal freedoms, writes Professor Lewis, "but in such a profoundly unequal society their role becomes the well-nigh impossible one of containment."

She adds: "More oppressive poverty means social problems will be manifested in more worrying ways." Professor Lewis also attacks politicians for failing to tackle social problems affecting children. She says: "The statistics on child poverty have been reasonably well-publicised, as have been the shocking outcomes for a high percentage of children in care. But there is no sign of any political party worthy of the name embracing the language of investment in children. Calls for containment and control are much more prevalent."

In her wide-ranging article on the state of community care, Professor Lewis calls for a change in tone and content of debate, to re-invent the language of "trust, mutual aid, co-operation and citizenship" against the current tone of consumerism and private responsibility.

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صكتا من الامل

By-election move could bring eve of poll defeat

Major faces gamble with election suicide

Colin Brown and Fran Abrams

John Major is ready to take a gamble by holding the Wirral South by-election within weeks of the general election.

Senior Tory Party sources said the by-election would be held by 6 March, giving the Tories a severe test before the Prime Minister calls the general election.

Tony Blair declared: "I am delighted that we are going to have the by-election. We have been pressing for this. The Conservatives have been forced into it."

"The people of Wirral can give a lead to the rest of the country, and they will be choosing between a Conservative Party that really has nothing now to say about the future of this country, and a Labour Party that's got the policies and the energy and the ideas to sort out the issues that this country really needs sorting out."

Speculation on an Easter General Election was mounting last night following reports that the Tories are preparing for a large-scale poster campaign in late March.

According to a story in today's *Campaign*, the trade mag-



By the book: Brian Mawhinney said by-election will be called

azine of the advertising industry, the party has cancelled some site bookings made for late April and early May and has instead brought forward the second half of March and for early April.

The news has fuelled rumours that the election could be announced at the Conservatives' spring gathering in Bath in mid-March and could be held on 10 April. Although party sources are still stressing that the favoured date for the election is 1 May, the day before Good Friday has been mentioned as a possible polling day.

Yesterday's news suggests

that at the very least they are keeping their options open in case the government looks unlikely to survive until May.

Brian Mawhinney, the Tory party chairman, announced yesterday that the Tories would be holding a by-election within three months of the death of an MP.

Barry Porter, the Tory MP for Wirral South since 1979, died on 3 November last year leaving the Tories with a dilemma of trying to delay until the general election, or risking a defeat within weeks of the election being called.

The Tories will be defending a majority of 8,183. Party sources denied Labour claims they had been pushed into calling the by-election.

"Canvass returns in Wirral are very good and quite encouraging. We are doing a lot of work there. We have a team in place. The economy is doing very well. The Prime Minister feels there is a sea-change going on in the country."

He goes out in the country and feels a different mood on the ground to the one at Westminster. He feels there is a very different atmosphere out there. South Wirral could be very uncomfortable for Tony Blair.

It could rank in importance alongside the pre-election by-elections in Hull, Bermondsey and Greenwich.

The last time the Tories held a seat in by-election was in Richmond, Yorkshire, when William Hague, the Secretary of State for Wales, was the victor in 1989.

A victory, even in a safe seat, after a string of by-election defeats, would give the Tories a boost of confidence to take on Labour in the general election, but a defeat, which must be counted as likely, could sap morale before the big battle. However, the Conservatives will be hoping that if they do lose, the swing to Labour will be limited.

The Tory high command was pressing for the by-election to be held before Christmas, to avoid a possible defeat being regarded as a pointer to the general election outcome.

Labour MPs were threatening to move the writ if the Tories delayed any longer. Mr Mawhinney said the Government would abide by the convention but he did not say when the writ would be moved.

Labour claimed the Tories had bowed to pressure. "Privately, they don't want to hold it. They couldn't continue with the embarrassment," said a Labour source. "It is a remarkable opportunity for us."

1992 results: Porter 8 (Lab 25,599 (58.8%); Southwicks 18 (Lab 17,407 (54.6%); Cunliffe E (Lib-Dem) 4,581 (33.1%); Birchington N (Green) 584 (2.3%); Griffiths G (NLP) 122 (0.6%).



No smoke without fire: Anthony Samuelson, who intends to continue his anti-tobacco crusade by standing for Parliament - "Everyone has the right to redress a grievance and the way to do this is to petition the Privy Council" Photograph: John Voos

Candidate aims to smoke out Tories' tobacco lobby funding

Michael Streeter

A pensioner is to petition the Privy Council to investigate tobacco industry funding of the Conservative Party and the role of the tobacco lobby in Britain.

Anthony Samuelson, 67, a former councillor and Conservative supporter, intends to stand in the South Wirral by-election on an anti-smoking ticket and has asked more than 30,000 potential voters in the constituency to back his petition.

Mr Samuelson, a retired film executive and former lawyer, believes he is the first citizen for hundreds of years to seek an inquiry from the Privy Council -

an ancient body whose formal role is as adviser to the monarch. "Everyone has the right to redress a grievance and the way to do this is to petition the Privy Council," said Mr Samuelson, who lives in north London.

He added: "The Privy Council lies at the heart of our constitution and the petition has to be dealt with in accordance with constitutional usage."

"This means that whilst it can be rejected, it cannot be ignored."

Whatever the date and result of the by-election - which follows the death of Conservative MP Barry Porter last year - Mr Samuelson hopes the Privy

Council will order an investigation into what he sees as one of the great unreformed social evils of society.

"The tobacco industry uses advertising, promotions and sponsorship to put about the idea that smoking is the cool, smart, sociable and adventurous thing to do. As a result one in five of our children will become hooked before their 16th birthday."

Last year, he stood as an independent in the Staffordshire South East by-election but through lack of publicity felt he had failed to do the anti-tobacco cause justice.

"I had not intended to stand again, and I will certainly not

stand at the general election, but I thought this was an opportunity to get it right."

Mr Samuelson is asking the constituents of South Wirral to write to him in support of the petition. He will not comment on the exact cost of his campaign but believes it could run into a "five-figure" sum.

"I looked upon it as a choice between say a first-class berth on a world cruise or doing this. I chose this and my wife Carol supports me."

The constitutional expert Vernon Bogdanor, of Brasenose College, Oxford, said the petition to the Privy Council was a waste of time. "It is purely a formal body," he said.

Labour's pledge on tax opens rift with Lib Dems

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Deep divisions yesterday opened up between Labour and the Liberal Democrats over tax and spending on the health service after Tony Blair ruled out higher personal taxes to pay for more public expenditure.

Accusing the Labour leader of dishonesty, Simon Hughes, the Liberal Democrat spokesman on health, said Labour's refusal to say they would increase taxes after the election was "not credible". And he added: "I don't think the voters would allow them to get away with it. It is dishonest because if you promise no tax increases and then you have to, then you are in the same position as the Tories who promised low taxes but didn't deliver them."

Mr Hughes said the Liberal Democrats would be prepared to put up taxes to pay for their proposed reforms of the NHS. And he gave a firm commitment that his party would match the Tories' pledge to raise spending on the NHS in real terms every year - answering one of the eight key questions raised by *The Independent*, which has been dubbed by Labour.

He said: "People would be willing to see more of their taxes spent on the health service if it was necessary to sustain the NHS." And he made it clear he wanted to play a role in a Labour government in order to make it more radical. "We want to be in government and our job, we think, is more than ever important because the Labour Party are so weak in some areas, particularly in commitment in the financial area."

Mr Hughes's criticism was set on by the Tory party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, who said it showed that a Lib-Lab alliance would produce "double danger". Mr Blair's pledge not to put up personal taxes was "yet more evidence that New Labour will say virtually anything to try to win the next election".

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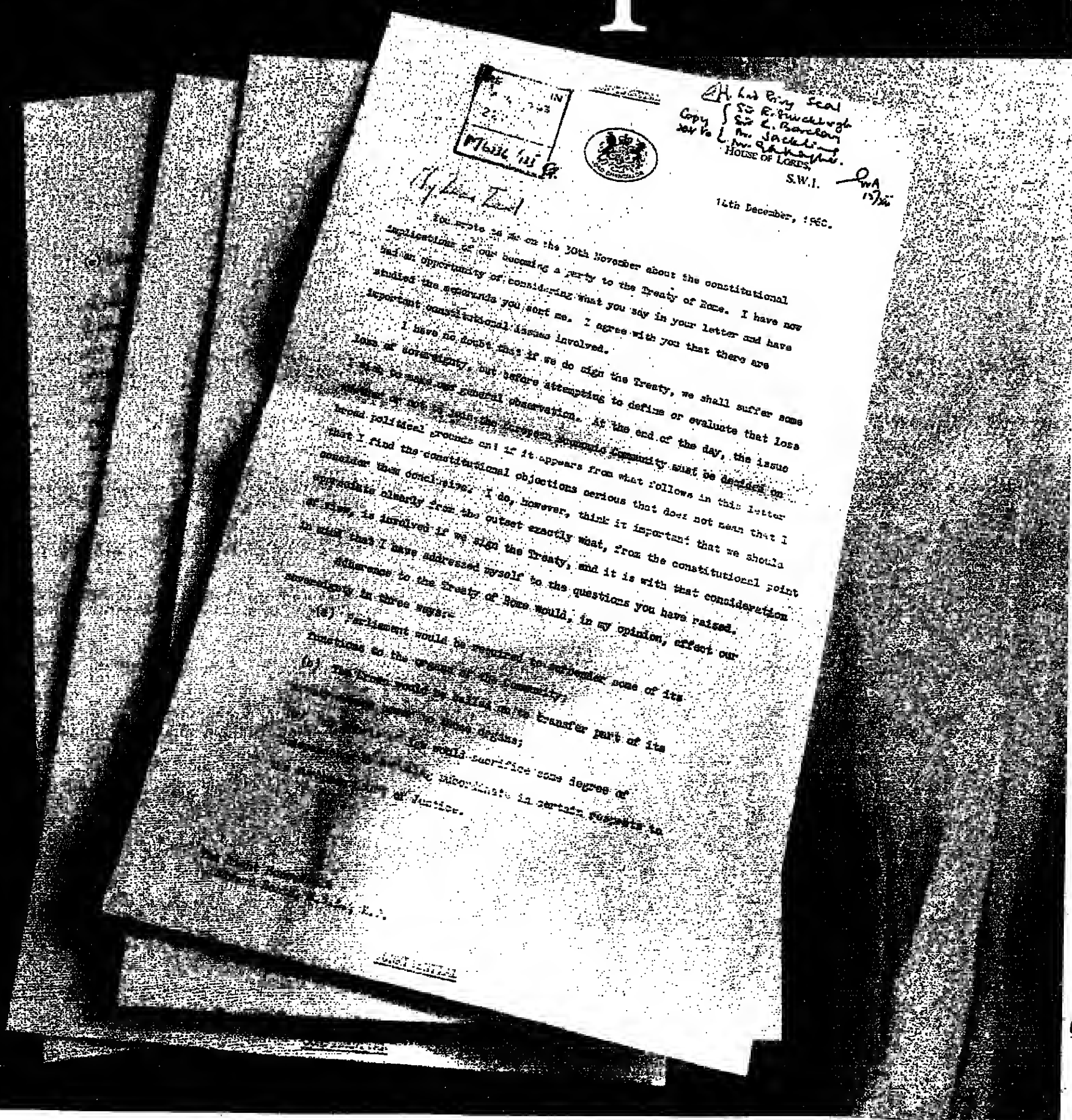
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Milosevic set to concede defeat in elections

Andrew Gumbel
Belgrade

President Slobodan Milosevic appears to be on the verge of a major climbdown in his stand-off with street demonstrators in Serbia's major cities and the crisis could be resolved as early as this weekend, political and diplomatic sources in Belgrade say.

Information emanating from the highest circles of the Serbian government suggests that Mr Milosevic is prepared to concede defeat in the municipal elections held last November so that he can restore order on the streets and ward off the prospect of punitive sanctions from the international community.

The eight weeks of protests have badly eroded Mr Milosevic's authority, even within the ranks of his own supporters. Members of his party, the SPS, have spoken out against him in Serbia's sister republic, Montenegro, while his erstwhile allies among the Serbs of Bosnia have come out unequivocally in favour of the protesters.

The resolve of the students and opposition leaders on the streets, by contrast, has been unwavering, as has the attitude of Europe and the United States who have made clear they expect the municipal election results to be respected in full.

Yesterday, the 53rd straight day of protest in Belgrade, was a typically uncomfortable experience for the government, with students organising a high-spirited plan of civil disobedience against the riot police.

The students had planned to keep up a 24-hour happening, with literature students reading Dostoevsky to the police "so they wouldn't get bored", and medical students advising them about the health risks of wearing riot helmets over an extended period. But the police did not have the stomach for the confrontation and stood back while the protesters swarmed unimpeded all around them.

All week, the government has been making concessions as the pressure has mounted. On Wednesday they admitted defeat in Nis, Serbia's second city, while yesterday the Supreme Court instructed the authorities in the northern town of Vrsac to reconsider the merits of the opposition's case.

The independent media, meanwhile, has been awash with rumours that the Serbian Prime Minister, Mirko Marjanovic, is about to resign along with some or all of his government team. The mayor of Belgrade, Nebojsa Covic, has also threatened to quit.

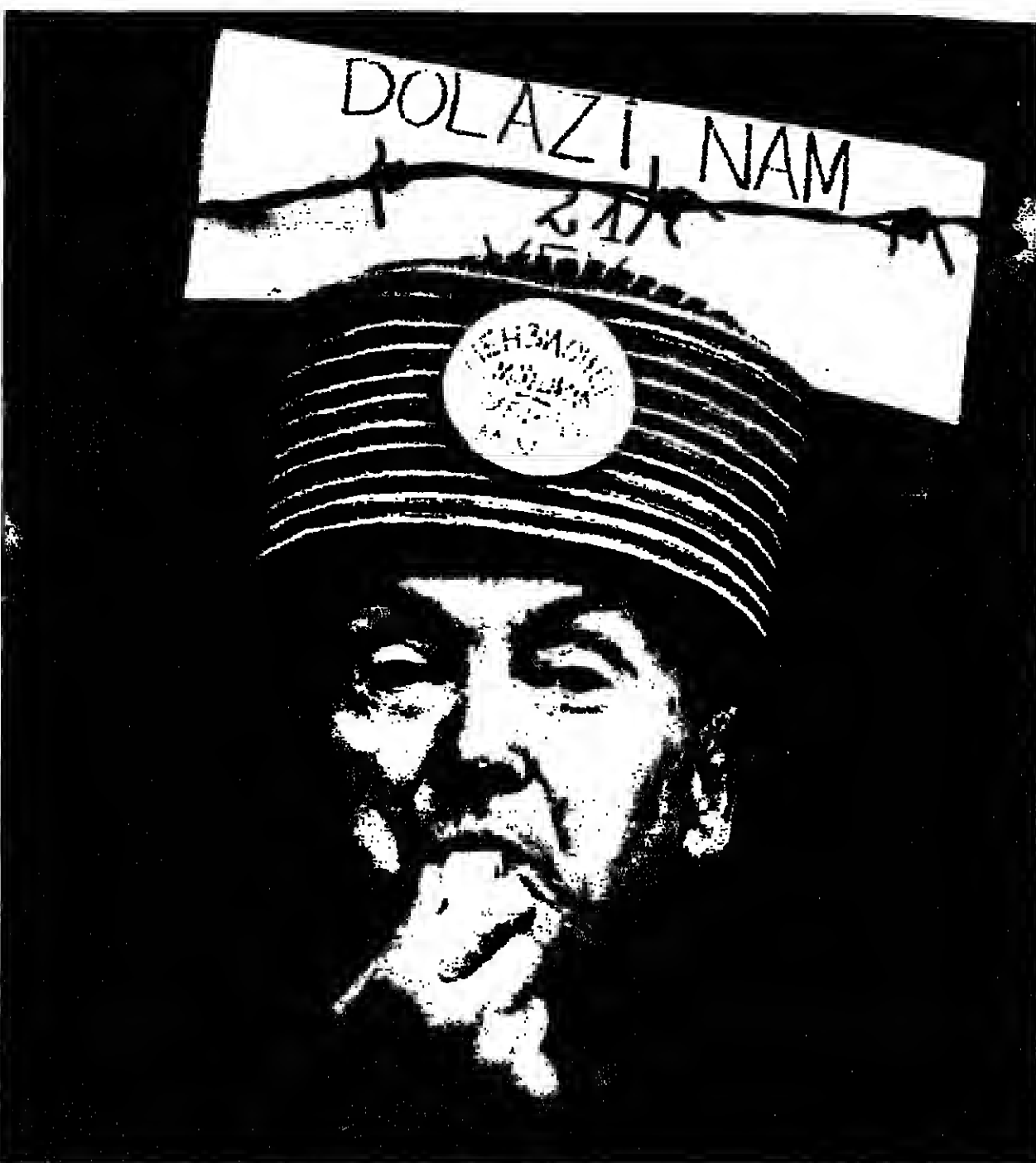
The scenario being suggested yesterday was that the election results would be recognised

this weekend. Mr Milosevic would then issue a ban on street protests and, once passions had cooled, quietly reshuffle his government to eliminate the most unpopular hardliners.

Already, there are indications of a rush among his supporters to be considered among the more moderate faction. Yesterday's independent newspapers reported a furious row breaking out at a meeting of the hardline Communist JUL party which is led by Mr Milosevic's wife, Mirjana Markovic, over the merits of giving in to the protesters rather than attempting to quash them by force.

If Mr Milosevic does climb down, it is by no means clear that he will be able to restore his tattered authority to survive the Serbian parliamentary and presidential elections due by the end of the year. Opposition control of the country's biggest municipalities will vastly extend their access to the media, and will provide an important safeguard against electoral cheating.

The opposition's increased profile will also make it difficult for Mr Milosevic to alter the constitution, as he had apparently planned, to ensure there is still a role for him after the Serbian elections. Under present rules he would be obliged to bow out since he has already served two terms as president.



Blowing time: A street protester in Belgrade wears a badge saying 'The 21st century is coming'

Photograph: AFP

Foreign Legion patrols Paris

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

Soldiers from France's famed Foreign Legion are patrolling underground and suburban train stations in Paris as part of the security alert revived after last month's terrorist bomb at Port Royale station. It is the first time that the legionnaires, who began their duties this week, have taken up duties in the French capital.

According to the defence ministry, there is no particular significance to read into their arrival in Paris. It is part of the regular rotation of units serving the capital in the anti-terrorist alert coded 'Vigilance'.

Ministry sources said, however, that there were insufficient regular troops stationed in the Paris region to provide the cover required under Vigilance, and other regions had been asked to help. A total of 750 troops are currently engaged in patrolling the capital, 300 of them from the Foreign Legion.

The legionnaires are paired with gendarmes or riot police (CRS) to patrol sensitive areas like stations, airports and such landmarks as the Eiffel Tower. They do not have the right to arrest or search people.

The Foreign Legion, which was founded in 1831 to engage exclusively in foreign operations, is based in Provence and numbers 8,500 men. Anyone can join, and may conceal his identity to do so, but must sign up for a minimum of five years.

Primakov admits Chechnya will gain independence

Phil Reeves
Moscow

In the most explicit remarks of their kind from a senior Moscow politician, Yevgey Primakov, Russia's Foreign Minister, yesterday acknowledged that Chechnya may soon gain full independence - a proposition that the Kremlin has always fiercely opposed.

His comments are tantamount to recognition that Russia, which this

week said it had withdrawn its last troops from the wrecked republic, has emerged the loser from a 21-month war in which many tens of thousands of lives were lost.

For President Boris Yeltsin, they are also a reminder of one of his nastiest political wounds which comes as he is sidelined by illness yet again - this time by a bout of pneumonia, which has wrecked his plans for a bounce-back after his multiple coronary bypass operation two months ago.

According to Russian news agencies, Mr Primakov told a cabinet meeting that there was a "real danger that Chechnya will secede from Russia both *de facto* and *de jure*". He added that Moscow must work to prevent, or at least to cushion, such a development.

His warning is likely to fuel the indignation of those in the upper echelons of Moscow's political and military circles who regard Russia's peace accord with the Chechens as a

humiliating capitulation. Under the August accord, both sides agreed to postpone a settlement on the republic's status until 2001. In the meantime, they planned to maintain a state of "constructive ambiguity" on their fundamental disagreements over the issue, setting it to one side rather than allowing the deal to founder.

Mr Primakov's warning contradicts that strategy. Elaborate preparations are under way for elections in the Caucasus republic on 27 January,

the five top candidates are separatists.

His comments were out of his only broadside aimed at the recalcitrant outer edges of the former Soviet empire. He also called for the cabinet to impose economic sanctions on former Soviet republics whom Moscow accuses of discriminating against ethnic Russians living on their territory, in particular Estonia.

Meanwhile, the President's aides were busy trying to contain concerns over his health following Wednesday's revelation that - a fortnight after returning to work following heart surgery - Mr Yeltsin had developed pneumonia and was back in the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow.

The Kremlin was at pains to emphasise that his ailment was not related to his recent surgery, that his temperature was normal, and that he was being treated with antibiotics.

They indicated he was even managing to work - holding, for example, a 15-minute conversation with the

Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin.

Although such explanations received a generally sympathetic hearing in wintry Moscow, where 60,000 have fallen victim to a flu epidemic, they did not deter his chief opponent, the sacked national security adviser, Alexander Lebed, from continuing to attack. The retired general - who intends to run for the presidency - spent the day rumbling to reporters about Russia's "rudderless" condition and "power vacuum".

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Last resting place: The Boulder mansion in which the body of JonBenét Ramsey was found on Boxing Day

Police in the dark on Colorado child murder

Tim Cornwell
Boulder

Two weeks after six-year-old JonBenét Ramsey was found strangled and bludgeoned to death in the cellar of her house, residents of this quiet Colorado university town waited to hear the first statement from their police chief on what is rapidly becoming America's latest celebrity murder.

Tim Koby was due to meet five local reporters for a discussion to be broadcast on Boulder's municipal cable network last night. His police department, which has released virtually no information on its investigation, has so far pointed to no suspects or even tangible leads in the death of the child beauty queen.

Home videos of JonBenét – pronounced Shaunberney – sauntering down catwalks, pre-

cociously belting out patriotic songs – have seared the image of the dead child into the American public mind.

Early on Boxing Day morning, Boulder police were called to the home of John Ramsey, founder of a billion-dollar high technology company. His wife, Patsy, a former Miss West Virginia, told of finding a neatly written three-page ransom note that said "We have your daughter" and demanding the strange sum of \$118,000. For eight hours, it is now reported, police waited for the kidnappers to call while a local bank provided the cash. In what was a highly unusual procedure, they then asked Mr Ramsey to search his house for anything unusual.

He found his daughter's body in the wine cellar, her mouth sealed with duct tape, a cord around her neck, her skull fractured, and reportedly sexually

assaulted. Since the murder, the Boulder police department has responded to a full-scale invasion by the national press with almost total silence.

Drips and drabs of information, however, have tended to point the finger of suspicion at the family. Only the couple and their nine-year-old son were reported to be in the house that night, although Mr Ramsey's two grown children from a previous marriage had visited on Christmas Day. There was no apparent sign of a forced entry.

The bizarre circumstances of her death have brought comparisons to the case of Susan Smith, the South Carolina mother who confessed to drowning her two picture perfect children – also captured on family videos – after claiming they were kidnapped by a carjacker.

Mr and Mrs Ramsey have both hired lawyers and a media adviser. They made a single tearful appearance on CNN, but have not so far agreed to be formally interviewed by police. When Mrs Ramsey warned of a "killer on the loose", city officials went out of their way to say there was no danger to the public.

The ransom note – and part of a "practice" note where the author apparently tried to change his or her handwriting – were matched to a pad found in the house, according to local newspaper reports.

But family friends have noted that with the Ramseys having spent a reported half a million dollars extending the house, numerous workmen had access. Others have suggested that a disgruntled employee of Mr Ramsey might have been behind a kidnap attempt.

A new lord takes giant strides up Capitol Hill

Washington — The United States has no post of leader of the opposition. But if it did, then there is scant argument over who would fill it. Not Bob Dole of course, vanquished by Bill Clinton in November and now septuagenarian superstar of the late-night comedy circuit; and certainly not the chastened 1997 model Newt Gingrich, humbled by ethical lapses despite the distinction of being the first Republican since the Depression era to win consecutive terms as Speaker. Instead, step forward Trent Lott, Trent who? The 105th Congress which opened this week should soon dispel any lingering ignorance.

As Senate majority leader, the post he took over from Mr Dole, Chester Trent Lott is lord of Capitol Hill and the most powerful Republican voice in the land. He will be his party's chief negotiator with the President and prime shaper of the Senate's business. Bipartisanship is the catchphrase of the hour. Whether word is transformed into deed depends on him, at least as much as Mr Clinton. And thus far the omens are good.

When he defeated his fellow Mississippian Thad Cochran to become Majority leader last June Lott was expected to be far more confrontational than the pragmatic and non-ideological Mr Dole. Was he not a former Democrat with the special fire of the converted, an obdurate who in his first term as a Congressman in 1974 was one of the very few to reject impeachment of Richard Nixon until almost the very end? But things have not worked out like that.

In one way certainly, Trent Lott is an emblem of his times, and the extraordinary grip of Dixie on the pinnacles of American politics. An Arkansan, he holds the White House, a Tennesseean the vice-Presidency; the Speaker is a Georgian, and the House Majority leader a Texan. And now another Deep Southerner at the helm of the

Trent Lott, the new Senate majority leader, is a man made to mediate, writes Rupert Cornwell

Senate. The rest though is paradox.

Lott may be an unabashed conservative, opposed to abortion, gun control and strong supporter of a balanced budget amendment and a reduced role for Government. But he is also a mediator who seems, oddly, to have learnt that skill much as Bill Clinton did, as a boy forced to intercede to keep the peace between his mother and an often drunken father (the couple would later divorce).

He is calculating and openly ambitious; never more so than when he successfully ran for the second ranking post of Republican Whip in 1994, after just one term in the Senate. But Lott is also gregarious and widely liked. He can sport a Southern drawl befitting one who grew up in Pascagoula on Mississippi's Gulf Coast – but can talk faster than a Brooklyn car salesman and dresses like a duke.

Above all, colleagues say, he is an organiser and an operator, scarcely less skilled at building legislative coalitions than Dole himself: in short a compromiser, as he must be in an institution of 100 individuals of whom a true majority is not the arithmetical 51, nor the present Republican strength of 55, but the 60 votes required to cut off a filibuster. Managing a body each of whose members are wont to look into a mirror and see a future President has been likened to herding cats or – to use Lott's preferred metaphor – "putting bullfrogs in a wheelbarrow".

And he might be forgiven some delusions of his own. His relative youth (Lott is only 55), the eminence of his job and his smoothness in front of the cameras virtually guarantees him a place on the list of potential Republican Presidential aspirants in 2000 or thereafter. For the moment though, in a system of divided government, most important is how he works with the present occupant of the White House, who is of course no mean operator himself. And the start has been promising. Butressed by a reinvented moderate called Bill Clinton and the dealmaker Trent Lott, that famous "vital centre" might just prevail after all.



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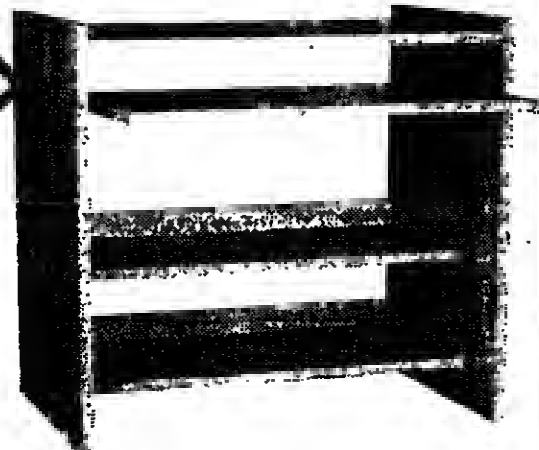
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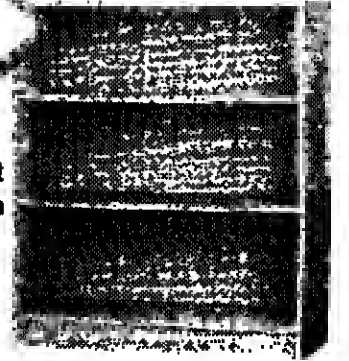
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Can a diplomat get away with murder?

A girl's death has fuelled the cries to end immunity, writes David Usborne in New York

A kerbside scuffle and a deadly car accident – two incidents in two cities in as many weeks – are triggering a passionate debate in the United States about the behaviour of foreign diplomats living here and their use – or abuse – of the centuries-old claim of diplomatic immunity to duck legal retribution.

Grumbling about diplomats and their lack of regard for US laws is a favourite sport in New York and Washington DC, where most of them are posted. Nearly always it is about trivial fare – non-payment of parking tickets – but the refrain is clear: those dips are getting away with murder.

Even the common-or-garden infractions can occasionally escalate into front-page controversies. Such was the case after Christmas in New York, when two foreign officials, from the Russian and Belarus missions to the United Nations, were challenged by police after parking their car near a fire hydrant.

There is disagreement on what happened next. The diplomats say they were beaten by the officers, the officers say they were attacked by the diplomats. The Russian government complained; New York's Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, demanded the pair be ex-

pelled from his city and the country.

But the New York affair – in which an indignant stalemate now prevails – has been eclipsed by the events of last Friday night on a busy street in Washington DC. A new Ford, hurtling at 80 miles an hour, slammed into the rear of a car stationary at traffic lights. The second car flew through the air and landed on a third, crushing and killing a passenger inside. She was 16-year-old Joviane Waltrick.

Getting away with murder is no longer metaphorical. Behind the wheel of the Ford – and, according to police, intoxicated – was Gueorgui Makharadze, number two at the Washington embassy of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. Prosecutors in Washington DC have said they would be ready to charge Mr Makharadze with negligent homicide – if only they could.

There seems little doubt the State Department will formally ask Georgia to waive the diplomatic immunity in Mr Makharadze's case. Few expect Georgia to acquiesce, however, in spite of a sympathetic letter of condolence sent by its president, Eduard Shevardnadze, to Joviane's grieving parents. America will be able to expel Mr Makharadze but nothing more. Outrage over the case has

spread to Capitol Hill, where the New Hampshire senator, Judd Gregg, has called on the White House to suspend the \$30m (£18m) in US aid sent annually to Georgia. David Richin, a lawyer for the dead girl's family, said: "This to me is murder, and there has to be some recourse."

For countries willing to waive immunity for one of their representatives abroad is extremely rare. Belgium allowed the shield of immunity to be lifted from a low-level embassy official who was convicted of killing two men in Miami. He is serving 25 years in a US jail. But nor is serious crime exactly rampant among diplomats posted in the US. Figures released by the State Department this week show that in a diplomatic corps that numbers 118,000 people (of which 18,000 enjoy immunity), less than one tenth of one per cent were involved in serious crime in 1995.

Petty abuse is endemic, however. In the New York case, it emerged that the car involved, from the Belarus mission, had been ticketed for traffic violations no less than 386 times in 1996; none had been paid. The 100-odd car fleet of the Russian mission, meanwhile, attracted an astonishing 14,437 tickets in six months of last year.



Red alert: A Chinese diplomat attacking police in London in August 1967. About 30 Chinese assaulted police after they parked a police car outside the Chinese Mission. The diplomats were barred from leaving the country without permission

The principle of diplomatic immunity was not formally established by international agreement until 1961 and rests on the principle of reciprocity: the main reason to treat other people's diplomats with respect is that if you do not your own are placed in jeopardy, writes Christopher Bellamy.

The aim is only to allow diplomats to carry out their functions with security and confidentiality, and also to recognise diplomats' function as representatives of their country. It does not grant them freedom to flout local law, although they may be immune to local jurisdiction to enforce such laws. Contrary to a widespread belief, a diplomatic mission is not "extra-territorial": it is, however, given the protection of inviolability within the receiving state. This rule refers to its premises and diplomatic dispatches. But all privileges and immunities are solely directed towards facilitating performance of diplomatic missions.



Double indemnity: The streets of west London are littered with illegally parked cars carrying diplomatic plates

Embassy staff feeling the long arm of British law

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

Diplomats in Britain who abuse their status by flouting the law with impunity are facing an increasingly tough response from the Foreign Office.

A clampdown was launched shortly after Libyan officials used diplomatic immunity to thwart an investigation into the 1984 murder of police constable Yvonne Fletcher, who was killed by a shot from the Libyan People's Bureau in London.

Until then diplomats openly abused the system, under which they are immune from prosecution by British law, notching up 22,337 unpaid parking tickets in 1986. That number fell to 1,586 in 1995. Among the worst parking culprits were the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Angola, and Nigeria.

Last year there were 34 serious offences, which included 18 drinking and driving cases and a number of thefts and shoplifting incidents.

There are about 2,500 people with diplomatic status in Britain and an additional 7,000 dependents, all of whom under the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1996 are exempt from British law.

But the Foreign Office has been placing increasing pressure on governments and ambassadors for their representatives to obey our laws and waive immunity in cases that are considered serious.

A Foreign Office spokesman said: "After the Yvonne Fletcher case we looked closely at the issue – we have taken a much tougher approach now."

Despite the crackdown, there has still been a series of high-profile cases in which diplomats have apparently used their status to escape justice.

When PC Fletcher was shot in 1984 outside the Libyan embassy, her killer was believed to be a diplomat inside. But he was never brought to justice. James Ingley, an American lay preacher, was accused of a sex attack on a six-year-old girl in his care in 1987. His wife worked at the US Embassy in London and the charges were dropped.

In 1986 Indian envoy Bahu Lal Gupta, who was accused of plotting to smuggle £320,000 worth of heroin into Britain, also escaped prosecution. Cuba's ambassador Dr Oscar Fernandez-Mell was expelled in 1989 after one of his officials fired live bullets in a crowded London street, narrowly missing a bus.

And only last month Iris Ramirez-Paget, for five years the first secretary at the Honduras Embassy in London, fled Britain after being accused of fraudulently obtaining £36,000 in housing benefit and thousands of pounds in income support.

But the number of offences has been dropping and evidence of the tougher line was provided last July when a Zimbabwean diplomat who twice claimed immunity after driving under the influence of alcohol in London was recalled. The Zimbabwe Foreign Affairs Ministry summoned back Charles Mayengehama, 33, the First Secretary at its High Commission in the Strand.

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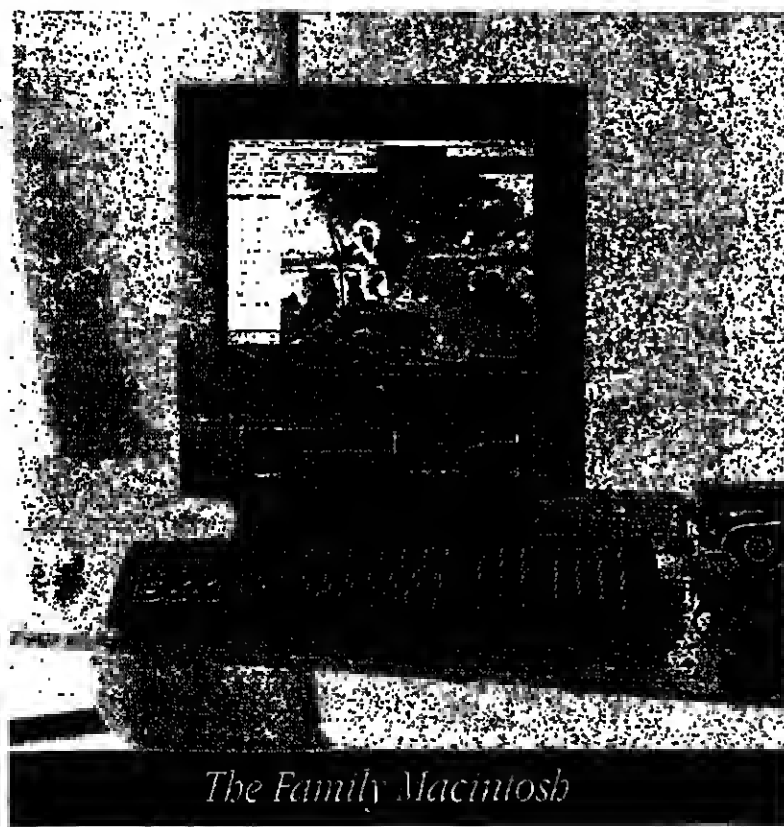
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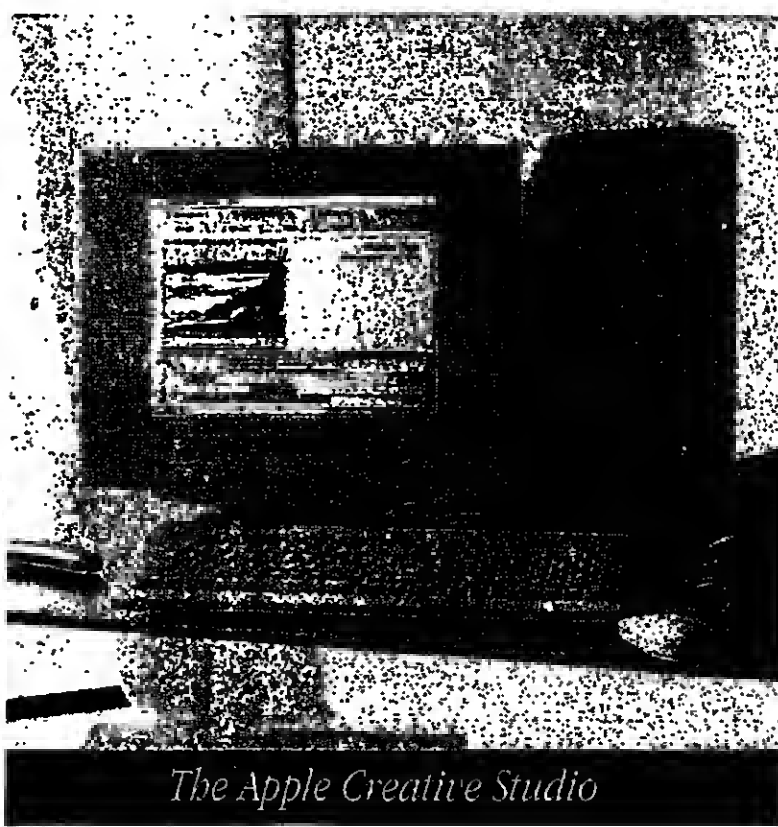
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Stars attack Germany's stance on Scientology



Dustin Hoffman: Compared today's 'persecution' to 1930s

Imre Karacs
Bonn

Hollywood's finest have risen against German oppression, striking a blow for a well-heeled but persecuted minority. In an "open letter" addressed to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, cunningly disguised as a full-page advert in yesterday's *International Herald Tribune*, Dustin Hoffman, Goldie Hawn and company accuse the German government of Nazi-style repression of Scientologists.

You may feel that, as non-Germans, this is none of our

business," write the 34 celebrities, none of whom belongs to the Church of Scientology. "But... when a modern nation demonstrates its unwillingness to protect the basic rights of a group of its citizens, and indeed, exhibits a willingness to condone and participate in their persecution, right thinking people in other countries must speak out."

"Extremists of your party should not be permitted to believe that the rest of the world will look the other way. Not this time."

The stars, who also include film director Oliver Stone and

novelists Mario Puzo and Gore Vidal, complain that members of Scientologists are banned from German political parties, excluded from jobs in public service, and their children are expelled from schools. "And—like the book burning of the 1930s—your party has organised boycotts and seeks to ban performances of Tom Cruise, John Travolta, Chick Corea and any other artist who believe in Scientology."

"In the Germany of the 1930s, Hitler made religious intolerance official government policy," the letter stated. "Jews were first marginalised, then excluded

from many activities, then vilified and ultimately subjected to unspeakable horrors." It added: "In the 1930s, it was the Jews. Today it is the Scientologists."

A spokesman for the *International Herald Tribune* in Paris said the advertisement was placed by Bertram Fields, a Los Angeles entertainment attorney who also signed the letter.

There is an element of truth in the charges, but they are not entirely accurate. The "boycott" of Tom Cruise consisted of a group of young Christian Democrats distributing leaflets outside cinemas showing his latest

film, *Mission: Impossible*. Chick Corea was prevented from performing at a publicly-funded concert because he was a Scientologist.

All parties, however, support moves to curb the activities of a group they do not accept as founded on religious principles, and a ban on Scientologists in public services has been enacted in some conservative Länder. Mr Kohl's government is now trying to extend that nationwide. Authorities also agreed to consider putting Scientology under surveillance by the anti-extremist Office for

the Protection of the Constitution. Many other countries, including Britain, have taken steps to curtail the Church of Scientology.

Heber Jentzsch, president of the Church of Scientology International, said in a statement released in London that he hoped "Chancellor Kohl heads their admonition to restore democratic principles in his country". The Chancellor himself was not prepared to respond to the criticism, however. "They don't know anything about Germany and they don't want to either," Mr Kohl said. "Otherwise

they wouldn't have talked such rubbish."

Ignorance cuts both ways. Mr Kohl admitted he had not seen the letter, and asked if he planned to respond, he said: "No, I do not have any intention whatsoever of reacting. I haven't read the names of those who signed this thing." He was supported by Rudolf Scharping, parliamentary leader of the opposition Social Democrats. "This letter is unacceptable, if only because of the scandalous comparison between today's Germany and Hitler's fascism," he told the newspaper *Bild*.

Taliban threat forces uneasy pact

Russia has asked for Britain's help over the Afghan crisis. Christopher Bellamy reports

The continued success of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban in Afghanistan has brought about a bizarre rerun of the 19th-century "Great game", when British and Russian diplomats engaged in cloak-and-dagger operations to establish influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia in the face of a Russian threat to invade the British Raj in India.

But in the new game, the players are rather different. Russia has quietly asked Britain for help, and the two former imperial adversaries find themselves arrayed with France, Iran and other former Soviet republics against Britain's ally the United States.

In recent weeks, the Taliban — "seekers of religious knowledge" — who seized Kabul in the autumn have continued to drive back the Jamiat-i-Islami faction led by the military commander, General Ahmed Shah Masood.

The Taliban have continued to make gains north of Kabul,

welcome to Iran. Neighbouring Uzbekistan is uneasy about Islamic fundamentalists, particularly Pathans, so close to its borders. Tajikistan fears that fundamentalist influences might reinforce Islamic insurgents on its territory, and Russia fears they might spread in Russia, too.

On 4 October last year, Russia called a conference of the CIS to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, which is adding to its concerns about security in the former Soviet Union — the "near abroad". By the end of last year, Russia was openly asking NATO for help in improving security in central Asia.

Pakistan, which has given some encouragement and support to the Taliban, also has its concerns. It is worried that the Taliban may revive demands for an independent Pathan state (Pushunistan) which would incorporate an extensive belt of Pakistani territory.

The Pakistan government also worries about a spill-over of militant Islam from Afghanistan, which is already happening — the Taliban have received training and weaponry from extreme Islamic groups in Pakistan.

However, alone among the great powers, the United States has been supporting the Taliban — because of its historic antipathy towards both Russia and Iran. Diplomatic sources said they found the US attitude rather naïve, but there was no doubt of its direction.

That has brought about the unlikely and unwelcome prospect of British and French weaponry and advisers on General Masood's side clashing with US advisers and matériel on the Taliban side.

The Foreign Office said yesterday that it remained committed to the current arms embargo prohibiting supplies to Afghanistan and that Britain's main concern was to maintain the Overseas Development Administration's aid project in Afghanistan which the Taliban regime has hindered.

Diplomatic sources said they were very concerned about the repression of women and the implementation of Islamic sharia law, but has refused to comment on suggestions that Britain was playing a more active role, and stressed that British diplomats in the region would meet representatives of any of the warring factions. However, other sources say that other options are also being canvassed.

Afghanistan is already awash with weapons, mostly inherited from the 10-year Soviet war.



Hands off: John Bull warding off trespassers at the Afghan border, as represented by *Punch* in 1885. In the 19th century, Britain and Russia engaged in cloak-and-dagger operations to establish influence in Afghanistan in the face of a threat to invade British India. Photograph: Mary Evans Picture Library

However, the Taliban have also acquired US weapons via Pakistan.

Harold Wilson famously said that "the frontiers of Britain lie on the Himalayas" — but he said it just before slashing Britain's defence commitments east of Suez. The renewed attention in London to Afghanistan is evidence that the end of the Cold War is taking Britain back into places which hitherto were only Imperial memories. A power vacuum has opened up, and Britain is one of many nations

edging into it.

It is partly oil and gas that has led to a revival of British interest. British Gas and BP are both involved in extracting gas and oil from Central Asia. British Gas is involved in a joint venture with Agip, an Italian company, and the Kazakhstan government to exploit a huge field at Kachaganak in Kazakhstan. BP is involved in joint ventures in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan to extract petroleum from the Caspian Sea. This has meant that there is considerable

concern in London over the stability of Central Asia, and a desire to assist Russia in maintaining it.

There are only two small gas distribution pipes running from Uzbekistan into Afghanistan, which date back to the days when Afghanistan was no more than a client regime of the Soviet Union. Until a stable and politically acceptable regime is established, Afghanistan is only of interest as a route to get relatively small quantities of oil and gas to Pakistan.



Two bombs injure 10 in Tel Aviv

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

Two bombs injured ten people, two of them seriously, in a poor area of south Tel Aviv last night in what may be the resumption of a Palestinian bombing campaign.

The bombs, however, were less lethal and less powerful than those used in February and March which killed 58 people in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Ashkelon.

The two blasts came ten minutes apart, near the old bus station, a slum district with a high crime rate — making it possible that the attacks were in fact part of a criminal feud. The first bomb, at 8.20pm, was in a garbage can and the second was a pipe bomb. Two of those injured were policemen caught in the second blast.

Hundreds of police swarmed to the area and cordoned off the site of the blast, and sources said they feared a third bomb might have been set up. A helicopter hovered over the area, apparently trying to spot possible assailants attempting to flee.

Early police reports suggested that the explosions had a political motive, but if so, the attacks appear less carefully planned than those earlier in the year.

If the bombs are blamed on a Palestinian faction they will further damage the chances of the right-wing government implementing the Oslo peace accord.

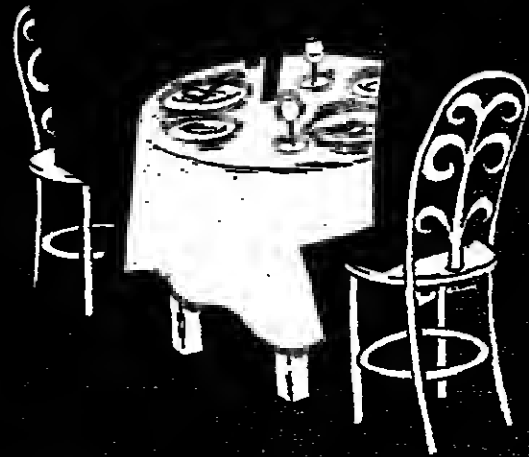
Israeli and Palestinian officials had feared radicals might try to stage attacks to scuttle an emerging deal on Israel's delayed pullout from the West Bank town of Hebron and a further troop pullouts in rural parts of the West Bank.

The Islamic Jihad, one of the groups responsible for suicide bomb attacks, is still committed to further military action against Israel. Its leader said at the end of last year that it was only a security measure by Israeli and Palestinian police which had prevented the planting of bombs.

Avigdor Kahalani, the Minister of Internal Security said last night that police thought Arab guerrillas were responsible. Last week, off-duty Israeli soldier Noam Friedman opened fire on a vegetable market in Hebron, injuring five people. He said he hoped to scuttle the Hebron accord. Islamic militant groups had said they would avenge that attack.

The chief of police said that the bombs had been packed with nails, and this suggested guerrilla attack.

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obituaries / gazette

Harman Grisewood

Harman Grisewood, a founding father of the Third Programme and the holder of several top positions in the BBC, rose by an unusual route. During the Second World War, he suddenly leapt from a relatively obscure post in Broadcasting House to become the Number 2 of the European Division in Bush House.

In 1941 Government ministers, using their wartime powers, had insisted that the BBC should appoint Ivone Kirkpatrick of the Foreign Office to the new post of Controller of the European Division, responsible immediately to the Director-General. The BBC in turn declared that Kirkpatrick must take as a deputy someone with substantial broadcasting experience. It was a hard driven bargain.

At Worcester College, Oxford, where he was a history scholar, Harman Grisewood had been a leading member of the OUDS. After he came down he took a humble job writing the labels for Fortnum and Mason's delicacies. One day an Oxford friend in charge of the *Children's Hour* at Savoy Hill invited him to read a chapter of *Ivanhoe* to the children. He came away with three guineas. This was three shillings more than he earned in a whole week at Fortnum and Mason. So he gave in his notice the next day and spent the next four years acting in radio plays with the BBC Repertory Company. In 1933 he joined the BBC staff as an announcer, like his better known cousin Freddie, and in



Grisewood: a cultivated mind

the early part of the war was engaged in routine work as a programme planner.

Harman Grisewood had a cultivated mind, though not at that time any great knowledge of foreign affairs, nor indeed of European languages. He had not sought the Bush House job, which involved a substantial promotion, nor had he even known of it before he was appointed. Moreover Kirkpatrick, who had been educated by Benedictines at Downside, considered he had no need of an Assistant Controller at all, and certainly not one who had attended Ampleforth, the Jesuit boarding school in Yorkshire. "Two Catholics," he warned Grisewood, "some people will make trouble."

But fears of a Protestant backlash were ill founded, and Kirkpatrick and Grisewood worked harmoniously together and with the rest of us in Bush House. Harman Grisewood headed the European Service

for nine months at the end of the war on a temporary basis, after the Foreign Office had reclaimed Kirkpatrick, and indeed had hopes of becoming its permanent chief.

But what was needed for the Controllership in peacetime was authority in Whitehall, which Grisewood, for all his qualities, lacked. The post went to Sir Ian Jacob, the former Assistant Military Secretary to the Cabinet, and Grisewood dropped down to become the number two in the Talks Division. He disliked its squabbling atmosphere and in 1947, unwell and disenchanted with the BBC, he resigned.

For a few months he tended his garden and regained his health. He then received a handwritten letter from George Barnes, the designated head of the new Third Programme, asking him on a personal and temporary basis to come and help him run it. Grisewood, who admitted to being "an inveterate highbrow", was delighted. Moreover their interests were complementary. Cantabrigian Barnes was Anglican, musical and romantic. Oxonian Grisewood was Roman Catholic, literary and classical. Together they enlarged the vocabulary of broadcasting.

In less than two years Barnes was promoted to a seat on the newly established Board of Management with the egregious title of Director of the Spoken Word (DSW). Grisewood followed in his footsteps first as Head of the Third Programme and eventually also as

DSW, responsible for those programme areas which attracted the most controversy: News, Religion, Talks and Education. Complaints from educationists and the clergy were usually just as vociferous as those from politicians, if marginally less self-serving.

When Sir Ian Jacob became Director-General he appointed Grisewood as his Chief Assistant and abolished the title of Director of the Spoken Word. Grisewood became the channel for communications between the DG and the political parties, as well as among the current affairs departments of the BBC. Grisewood's autobiography *One Thing at a Time* (1968) recounted a conversation at the time of Suez with Sir Anthony Eden's Press and Public Relations Secretary, the late William Clark. "William told me that the Prime Minister had instructed the Lord Chancellor to prepare an instrument which would take over the BBC altogether and subject it wholly to the will of the Government."

This statement was widely discussed after its publication in 1968 and even debated in the House of Commons. William Clark admitted to me some years later that in talking to Grisewood he had exaggerated the specific plans afoot. Clark's diary, written at the time of Suez, but published after his death, makes no mention of the alleged instruction to the Lord Chancellor.

Nevertheless throughout the Suez crisis the BBC was under very heavy pressure from the

Eden Government to avoid, in press reviews broadcast overseas for instance, any mention of domestic opinions critical of Eden's action. In the absence of Sir Ian Jacob at a Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference in Australia it fell to his Chief Assistant Harman Grisewood and the Acting Director-General, the late Air Chief Marshal Sir Norman Bottomley, to reassert the principle that long-term credibility must not be sacrificed to short-term political expediency and staunchly to preserve the political independence of the BBC.

Leonard Miall

Harman Joseph Gerard Grisewood, actor, BBC executive and author, born 8 February 1906; BBC Repertory Company 1929-33; Announcer, BBC 1933-36; Assistant to Programme Organiser 1936-39; Assistant Director Programme Planning 1939-41; Assistant Controller, European Division 1941-45; Director Talks Division 1946-47; Planner, Third Programme 1947-48; Controller of the Third Programme 1948-52; Director of the Spoken Word 1952-55; Chief Assistant to the Director-General 1955-64; CBE 1960; Knight of Grace and Devotion, SMO Malta 1966; author of Broadcasting and Society 1949, The Reckless 1963, The Last Cab on the Rank 1964, David Jones: Welsh National Lecture 1966, One Thing at a Time 1968, The Painted Kipper 1970, Stratagem 1987; married 1940 Margaret Bailey (one daughter); died Eye, Suffolk 8 January 1997.



Portrait of a Painter (Harman Grisewood) by David Jones, 1932. National Museums & Galleries of Wales

Sándor Végh

The death of Sándor Végh sees the passing of one of the last of the great Hungarian violinists who could trace their traditions back through Hubay and Joachim to the Italian violinist Viotti. Végh was, throughout his long career, soloist, chamber musician, conductor and teacher, and it would be difficult to say in which of these activities he served best the cause of music. In other words, he was a giant, whose accomplishments are indelibly etched upon every one of his undertakings.

Végh was born in 1912 in Kolozsvár in Transylvania and studied at the Academy of Music in Budapest (1924-30) with Jenő Hubay (violin), Leo Weiner (chamber music) and Zoltán Kodály (composition). He made his debut in 1931 with the Hungarian Trio and thereafter toured with them and as a soloist throughout Europe. He became leader of the Hungarian String Quartet from its foundation in 1935 until 1936, giving the first performance of the Bartók Quartet No 5 with them in Barcelona in 1936. In 1940 he founded the Végh Quartet which he led for 38 years, touring Europe, North and South America and Asia; they also recorded the complete cycles of the Beethoven and Bartók quartets and in 1978 the quartet's recording of Beethoven's Op. 130 was launched by NASA on board *Voyager's* extraterrestrial trajectory.

Végh was professor of violin at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest (1941-45) and emigrated to Switzerland in 1946. He became a French citizen in 1952, holding professorships at the Academy of Music, Basle (1953-63), the Hochschule für Musik, Freiburg (1956-64), Hochschule für Musik, Düsseldorf (1964-74) and the Hochschule Mozarteum, Salzburg (1970-87). At the same time he continued to give international master-classes, solo performances, play chamber music and make recordings. Outstanding among these are the Beethoven sonatas for Violin and Piano with Andras Schiff, and the complete Mozart piano concertos with Schiff and Végh conducting the Salzburg Camerata Academica.

Végh founded the Festival of Music at Cervo in Italy in 1962, and collaborated with Pablo Casals in the Festivals at Prades from 1953 to 1969, as a soloist



'Energy invested in music is never lost': Végh at the Edinburgh Festival, 1996. Photograph: Clive Barba

playing under many famous conductors including Willem Mengelberg, Ernő Dohnányi, Josef Krips, Casals, Rudolf Serkin and Wilhelm Kempff. He was also a guest artist at the Marlboro Festival in Vermont, in the United States, under Serkin, from 1974 to 1977.

It was when Végh was playing the Beethoven Concerto at a concert in Truro Cathedral that, at the invitation of Hilary Behrens, one of his ex-pupils, he took a few days off to absorb the magic of the far west of Cornwall. He was so inspired by the atmosphere that he asked Behrens if a session of Spring Master Classes could be set up there. So came about Végh's most important impact on the musical life of the UK. In 1972 with Behrens as co-director, they founded the International Musicians' Seminar (IMS) at Prussia Cove in Cornwall.

It was a huge success and attracted young musicians from all over the world to work and learn together in a relaxed, idyllic setting making music often far into the night. The success of the undertakings, further encouraged by Végh's experiences at the Marlboro Festival in Vermont, prompted the addition in 1975 of the IMS Open Chamber Music Seminar, held each September, which proved equally popular. Since its inception the IMS has become a symbol of ideal musical performance for

some 2,000 musicians throughout the world and has a firm place in British musical life. Végh retired as artistic director in 1996.

Végh's playing was distinguished by its purity and warmth of tone, and above all, his breadth of musical understanding. He was once asked what was the difference between his generation and the young people of today as regards their approach to music. He replied: "The great difference is that the world of today is permeated by technology and ruled by machines. Our generation was still near to nature and our experience of sensations of every kind was not watered down by mechanical reproduction. We came to our musical education already impregnated by a live and vibrant musical background. The whole atmosphere into which we were born was already, by definition, a musical one."

One had only to watch Végh giving a master-class to see what he meant. He would pinpoint exactly the fault of a student and by demonstrating, remonstrating and gesticulating like a ten-armed windmill, he would bring about a complete metamorphosis: in the most timid young player.

As a man he was small of stature, but gigantic in personality, and his facial expressions, grunts and gurgles were all part of the scenario which drew the most highly criticised 'students' to return

year after year to ask for more. When asked, well into his sixties, if he hoped to remain as active as ever into old age, he replied:

Activity is the expression of an inner rhythm. Energy invested in music is never lost. Rhythm is an expression of life itself. Everything that has to do with music will retard the onset of the process of ageing. To participate in music has a definite therapeutic value from this point of view. Have you ever seen a senile musician? Look at Emile Saëd, Felix Weingartner, Pierre Monteux, Ernst Ansermet, Stokowski, Arthur Schnitzler and many others.

In his own case, true to his words, Sándor Végh was still making beautiful music on his superb violin, the "Earl of Harrington" Stradivarius, right up to the last.

Margaret Campbell

Sándor Végh, violinist, born Kolozsvár, Transylvania 17 May 1912; Professor of Violin, Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest 1941-45; Professor of Violin, Academy of Music, Basle 1953-63; Professor of Violin, Hochschule für Musik, Freiburg 1956-64; Professor of Violin, Hochschule für Musik, Düsseldorf 1964-74; Professor of Violin, Hochschule Mozarteum, Salzburg 1970-87; artistic director, International Musicians' Seminar 1972-96; Honorary CBE 1988; married (one daughter); died Freiburg, Germany 7 January 1997.

Ronald Fowler's life as a teacher of economics, an original thinker, and a writer of scholarly texts was ended by Hitler when the Second World War drew him into the civil service and transformed a promising analyst of industry into a conscientious "public servant."

The Austrian economist Friedrich Wiesner, whose theory of value as "opportunity cost", the sacrifice of alternatives, I often discussed with Fowler, indicated the real cost of the lost scholar.

He was born in 1910, and showed early promise at Banor's School that led him to the London School of Economics, where he was taught by the influential liberal school of Professors Lionel (later Lord) Robbins, (Sir) Arnold Plant, (Sir) John Hicks and others. He graduated (with honours) in 1931, was awarded a Cassel Travelling Scholarship, named after the industrialist benefactor of scholarship Sir Ernest Cassel, and appointed Lecturer in Commerce in 1932, a post he filled until 1940 when he was recruited into the wartime Central Statistical Office.

At the LSE he had taken to research that yielded new insights on the pricing system of the market. His book on *The Depreciation of Capital* in 1934 was preceded by correspondence in 1932-33 on an idea being developed by his student friend, Ronald Coase, another Cassel Travelling Scholar, whose classic article "The Nature of the Firm" in the 1937 LSE journal, *Economica*, eventually revolutionised economic thinking on the structure of industry. Fowler's book showed that although the economic system of competing firms was, as Adam Smith showed in 1776, co-ordinated by the pricing system, it was the "transaction

costs" of deals between firms that explained why it was preferable to replace it only within firms by internal allocation of resources.

This theory was so radical that economists underrated it for many years. But together with another historic Coase article in 1961 on "The Problem of Social Cost", published in the *University of Chicago Journal of Law and Economics*, it formed the basis of the award to Coase in 1991 of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences. In his writings, as in his recent book *On Economics and Economics* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), Coase generously acknowledged the intellectual co-operation of the early 1930s from his student friend and colleague.

Fowler also collaborated fruitfully with Coase and another LSE colleague, (Sir) Ronald Edwards, Chairman of the Electricity Council, in the work of the Accounting Research Association on how the figures assembled for the balance sheets of companies could be used for economic research as a guide to the opportunity cost of resources used in production.

Fowler and Coase also worked on research which re-



Fowler: analytical

Ronald Fowler

vealed that, in deciding future output, producers did not, as economists had supposed, assume that prices would remain unchanged. If they did, output would fluctuate. In pig production they found that when prices were unusually high, producers expected them to fall, and when unusually low they were expected to rise. Fluctuations in prices would level out outputs. Fowler applied the analysis to the production of steel in an article published in the United States in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

From 1937 until military service I shared Fowler's room when I was appointed to the LSE Research Staff. I was awed to find that he had as neighbours the intellectual giant Friedrich Hayek and the distinguished refugee from Cambridge, Professor D.H. Robertson, who had moved after differences with the Keynesians. After the war Fowler and I lived near each other in west Kent. He was godfather to our first son.

Fowler also applied his analytical mind to Whitehall. He was at the Central Statistical Office from 1940 to 1950, at the Ministry of Labour as Director of Statistics and Under-Secretary from 1950 to 1968 and then Director of Statistical Research until 1972. On retirement he was Consultant to the Prices Division of Statistics Canada in Ottawa 1971-72.

His varied researches produced a published paper on "The Duration of Unemployment" in 1968 and two papers on "Problems of Index Number Construction" in 1970 and 1973. His consultancies led to articles in British and American economic and statistical journals. Fowler seemed to indicate that the change from the executive to the research post fol-

lowed a difference of opinion with a Minister.

Down the years there was much we discussed since we lived near each other. My efforts to persuade him to write for the Institute of Economic Affairs on general inferences for government policy-making, without divulging confidences, were invariably met by references to the Official Secrets Act. It is a gap in our knowledge of the working of government that the claims of politicians are not corrected by impartial advisers.

He was an upright Englishman with rigorous standards that would not allow him to speak of his anxieties about government activities and policies under both political parties. We shall never know how much his "public" services in Whitehall prevented him from benefiting the real public by academic scholarship.

Ronald Fowler lived quietly in his modest home in Kent with Brenda, his wife since 1937. She came also from a family which produced a distinguished economist, Dr Vera Smith, who married the Swiss economist Professor Friedrich Lutz. They were childless but enjoyed friendship.

Arthur Seldon

Ronald Frederick Fowler, economist, born 21 April 1910; CBE 1950; Sir Ernest Cassel Travelling Scholar 1929-30; Assistant Lecturer in Commerce, London School of Economics 1932-40; Central Statistical Office 1940-50; Director of Statistics and Under-Secretary, Ministry of Labour 1950-68; Director of Statistical Research, Department of Employment 1968-72; Consultant, Prices Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa 1971-72; Statistical Commission 1973-77; married 1937 Brenda Smith; died 5 January 1997.

Diana Morgan

I first met Diana Morgan 12 years ago, writes Dan Crawford, [further to the obituary by Adam Benedict, 6 January].

I had been asked to produce a revue for the King's Head, Islington, that would use material first performed at the pre-war Gate Theatre. Diana's careful crafting of the history of the Gate and her profound

understanding of the time historically and dramatically made the show a considerable success.

Diana was then commissioned by us to adapt Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* as a musical. This was finally presented in 1994 both over the summer holidays as a children's matinee and at

Christmas. It also played at the Watermill Theatre in Newbury to full houses over the 1994 Christmas season.

Diana Morgan was a marvellous team player, always ready to make rewrites in spite of the infirmity of age and near total blindness. If more humour was required, something that didn't come natural-

ly to *The Secret Garden*, she was able to supply it on the spot. She well understood the importance of sentimental shading, when to be stringent and when to let emotions flow.

I was also pleased to be able to produce her excellent play *The Dark Stranger*, starring Ruth Madoc, last year.

The Rev Geoffrey Marsh, Chaplain, Methodist Cathedral School (Hereford); retired 31 December.

Synagogue services

Details of synagogue services to be held tomorrow may be obtained by telephoning the following. Sabbath begins in London at 3.58pm. United Synagogue: 0171-387 4300. Federation of Synagogues: 0181-202 2343. Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues: 0171-580 1563. Reform Synagogues of Great Britain: 0181-349 4731. Spanish and Portuguese Jew Congregation: 0171-289 2753. New London Synagogue (Masorti): 0171-328 1026.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Princess Royal visits Reichenau, Meuse, Frankfurt, Gumbi, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany. Changing of the Guard The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am.

Births, Marriages & Deaths

BIRTHS

BORN: To Alison (née Middleton) and Chris, on 6 January, a daughter, Alexa Eugenie Cooke, a sister for Camilla and Cosmo.

DEATHS

SAMPSON: Peter Charles Frederick, formerly of Thames Television, died suddenly in Southampton Hospital, on 15 December 1996. Cherished husband and best friend of Jill, deeply loved by his children and stepchildren, Mark, Laura, Beth, Julian, Jessica, Cassian and adoring grandfather of Joe. Private funeral has already taken place. Donations to his memory, if desired, for the West Dorset Macmillan Service, c/o Brasher Brothers FID, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4QL, telephone 0147 823494.

Forthcoming marriages

Mr D. Phinnemore and Miss A. C. Croft The engagement is announced between Antoina Clare, only daughter of Jane and Maurice Croft, of Stow Longa, Cambridgeshire, and David, only son of Pauline and Jeffrey Phinnemore, of Datchet, Berkshire.

Birthdays

Sir Walter Bodmer, Principal, Hertford College, Oxford, 61; Mr Eddie Cheever, motor-racing driver, 39; Sir Robin Chichester-Clark, former MP and government minister, 69; Mr Thomas Clarke MP, 50; Sir Arthur Gold, honorary life president of the European Athletic Association, 80; Mr Derek Hammond-Stroud, opera baritone, 71; Sir David Hopkin, former Chief Metropolitan Specially Magistrate, 75; Sir Derek Horroby, former chairman, British Overseas Trade Board, 67; Mr Thomas Hutton, former chief exec-

utive of Total Oil, 76; Miss Dorothy Malone, actress, 72; Sir Robin Marshall, former chairman of the National Water Council, 77; Dr Peter Mathias, former Master, Downing College, Cambridge, 69; Sir David Miers, former ambassador to the Netherlands, 60; Sir David Newberger, High Court judge, 48; Mr Denis Pesch, former Chief Charity Commissioner, 69; Mr Alan Protheroe, journalist and broadcaster, 63; Mr Anton Rodgers, actor, 64; Mr Freddie Starr, comedian, 53; Mr Rod Stewart, rock singer, 52; Mrs Valerie Strachan, chairman, Board of Customs and Excise, 57; Mr Stephen Wall, UK Permanent Representative to the European Union, 50; Mr Errol J. Yates, former chairman and managing director, Kodak, 67.

Anniversaries

Births: Nicé Stenose, anatomist, 163; Michel 'ey, marshal of France, 1769; Dr George Birkbeck, educationist, 1770; John Euerich Acton, first Baron Acton, historian, 1834;

Karl Misching, composer and conductor, 1854; Manuel Azanza, president of the Spanish Republic, 1890; Grock (Adrien Wettach), clown, 1880; Alexei Nikolayevich Tolstoy, novelist and playwright, 1883; Dame Barbara Hepworth, sculptor, 1902; Johnnie Ray (John Alvin Ray), singer, 1927; Deaths: Pope Gregory X, 1276; William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, beheaded 1645; Carolus Linnaeus, botanist, 1778; Johann Georg Adam Forster, explorer and scientist, 1794; Samuel Colt, gunsmith, 1862; William Frederick Cody ("Buffalo Bill"), 1917; Sir John Lavery, painter, 1941; Gabriella Mistral, poet, 1925; Samuel Daniel, dramatist, writer, 1961; Gabrielle (Coco) Chanel, 1971; Nubar Sarkis, Lebanese millionaire, 1972; Chester Burnett ("Howling Wolf"), blues singer, 1976. On this day: the Royal Exchange, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, burned down, 1838; the penny post was begun (although the first stamps were not available until 6 May) and 112,000 letters were posted in London, 1840; the London Un-

derground (Metropolitan Railway) system was started, 1863; the tomb of Cleopatra was discovered, 1890; oil was discovered at the Spindletop Field, Texas, 1901; the League of Nations was inaugurated, 1920; after the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles by Germany and the Allies, the First World War officially ended, 1920; the film *Metropolis*, by Fritz Lang, was first shown, Berlin, 1926; the cartoon character "Tintin" appeared for the first time, 1929; the British government forbade citizens to enlist in armies of either side in the Spanish Civil War, 1937; the first assembly of the United Nations was held in London, 1946; the New London Theatre, Drury Lane, opened, 1973; in Zaire, the Niragongo volcano erupted, causing over 2,000 deaths, 1977; in Nicaragua, the leader of the opposition, and director of the newspaper *La Prensa*, R.J. Chamorro, was assassinated, 1978. Today is the Feast Day of St Agatha, pope, St Dermot or Diarmuid, St John the Good, St Marcellian of Constantinople, St Peter Orseolo and St William of Bourges.

Lectures

National Gallery: Jacqueline Lewis, "Victims of Anonymity (II). Workshop of the Master of the Life of the Virgin, Saint Hubert", 1pm.

Church appointments

The following appointments have been announced by the Church of England:

The Rev Helen Segley: to be Chaplain and Community Worker for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Wiltshire (Bristol). The Rev Christopher Chesson, Rector, St Dunstan and All Saints, Sneyd, to be Rector of St Edmundsbury (Suffolk). The Rev Timothea Harper, Vicar, St Peter, Brockley (Southwark); to be Rector, Amersham with Coldest (Oxford). The Rev Raymond Jones, Team Vicar, Rutbury (Salisbury); to be Chaplain, Fountains St Andrew, Spain (Europe). The Rev Michael Long, Vicar, Cayton with Eastfield, and Rural Dean of Scarborough; to be also non-residential Canon of York Minster (York). The Rev Gay Pys, Chaplain (NSM), HM Prison, Stafford; to be full-time Chaplain, HM Prison, Stroud (Gloucestershire). The Rev Bernard Schlimmer, Curate, St Martin-in-the-Fields (London); to be Priest-in-charge, Littlemore (Oxford). The Rev Eric Shepp, Director of Community Relations, General Synod of the Church of England, Church House, Westminster; to be Director of Communications for the Diocese of London. The Rev Alan Stevenson, Social and Industrial Chaplain for Swindon; to be Priest-in-charge, Swindon All Saints with St Barnabas (Wiltshire). Canon Vincent Stroud, Principal, St Alban and Oxford Ministry Centre; to be Curate in the Aylesbury Diocese (Oxford). The Rev Clive Utley, Leeds Industrial Mission Chaplain and Curate, Kirkstall; to be Vicar, Lothouse (Hampshire).

RESIGNATIONS AND RETIREMENTS

The Rev John Cayton, Vicar, St Peter, Fleetwood (Blackburn); to retire 28 February 1997. The Rev Timothy Harper, Vicar, St Peter, Brockley (Southwark); to be Rector, Amersham with Coldest (Oxford).

صكتان الامل

Flexible flexibility: Europe's way forward

John Major came out smiling from his meeting with Wim Kok, the Dutch Prime Minister, on Tuesday night. So, oddly enough, did Mr Kok. Their meeting was a reminder that Britain can do business in Europe on a mutually beneficial basis, even during the run-up to an election.

The Independent was pretty pleased with Tuesday, because it provided a straight answer to one of our benchmark questions for the election: will the Conservatives pull out of Europe if things go against them? No, said Mr Major, in a fairly unequivocal way. That was a signal to British voters, and to other European leaders, that although monetary union and the Social Chapter might be hotly contested in this election, membership of the European Union is not going to be a political football, and a good thing too.

Mr Kok and Mr Major were pleased because they came close to patching up a divisive row that had threatened to derail the intergovernmental conference, the long-distance talkfest that is intended to end in a rewrite of the Maastricht Treaty. The key area under discussion was flexibility, the idea that under certain circumstances a core group of countries in the European Union can go ahead of the others in exploring new areas of co-operation.

The main area for exploring flexibility will be what is called Common Justice and Home Affairs, the rag-bag

of policies that includes immigration, policing, judicial affairs and what diplomats call "drugs and thugs" – narcotics and organised crime. Some countries (led by Germany) want much tighter co-ordination and integration. Others (led by the British government) don't. We are an island, we have different legal and judicial traditions, and anyway, Michael Howard hates the EU.

There is a bigger philosophical issue behind this than the likes and dislikes of the Home Secretary, however. Flexibility is the buzzword in the EU, because there is a pressing need to find a way to accommodate EU partners with different needs and capabilities.

When there were six members of the European Community, it was right to move in lockstep. When there were nine, it became more difficult. Now there are 15; in five years there will be 20, 25, or 30, stretching from Dublin to Lublin and beyond. The EU has already started experimenting with the principle of different strokes for different folks: it provides monetary union, border control policy under the Schengen agreement, and defence arrangements in the Western European Union.

But it needs to go further. Both the Europhiles and the Europhobes agree that Europe has to accommodate diversity through flexible integration. John Major has talked about a multi-speed, multi-track, multi-layer Europe; Ger-

many talks about the dangers of forcing the whole convoy to travel at the pace of the slowest ship. But up until now, there has been no agreed definition of how to do this.

Britain wants to ensure that it cannot be forced out of an inner group and left on the shelf; equally, it wants the right to be involved selectively, in areas of integration that it thinks desirable. The federalists are worried that letting the slowcoaches keep a veto will take away the point of the exercise. There has been a choice between wobbly flexibility, too insubstantial to suit the hard-core Europeans, and doctrinaire flex-

ibility, too rigid to be of much interest to Britain. The compromise seems to be flexible flexibility: allowing people to go ahead, but making sure that those in the outer core have guaranteed safeguards.

This is a treble important move. First, it means that there is now room for agreement on the issue of the principles underlying European Union structures. Secondly, it means that a revision of the passages of the Maastricht Treaty covering justice and home affairs may now be possible. That would remove perhaps the single greatest obstacle to a new treaty for Europe. Thirdly, it

shows that even now – even in the heat of a pre-election campaign, when Cabinet ministers like Stephen Dorrell are hinting at a tougher stance on Europe – compromise can be reached by rational men using rational means.

It is quite possible, likely even, that the Prime Minister who agrees the new treaty will be Tony Blair rather than John Major. But the Labour leader is likely to have few problems with the kind of solution that Mr Major and Mr Kok have discussed. There is less difference between the two over the institutional future of Europe than either likes to pretend. Both have a healthy degree of scepticism about the grander and vaguer European pipe dreams: both want Britain in the European Union to stay; both realise that pragmatic compromises are the way to maintain that. The fact that Mr Major can maintain that line when the question of his leadership is being openly debated says much for him, and for the degree of continuity that should prevail when (if) Mr Blair steps through the doors of 10 Downing Street.

There are still plenty of hurdles. But probably, the new treaty will be agreed later this year without too much fuss and bother. There is still the danger of a Kok-up, of course, if the Netherlands decides to push things too far and too fast. That happened during the Maastricht

summit, when a Dutch treaty draft proved too federalist for several countries (including Britain and France) to swallow. And then there is the chance of a major catastrophe, if the Prime Minister again finds himself with his back against the wall in the run-up to an election and decides to play the Eurosceptic card.

But the odds are that neither party wants that. As Mr Major said, Europe needs a dose of British pragmatism, and that is what it seems to be getting.

Children in need of some charity

The awful story of Rikki Neave demands that we ask some fundamental questions. As Polly Toynbee has pointed out, the Prime Minister is misguided in his ritual attacks on social workers: part of the problem is that they do not have the resources to interfere enough. But then, it is also true that some social services departments are simply failures. In view of the role played by The Bridge, a charity which conducted the Neave inquiry, should not voluntary organisations with good track records, such as Barnardos and the NSPCC, be more involved? Is it time to turn to the private carers?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We need a real debate on the monarchy

Sir: If that was the "nation deciding", then God help us all. Carlton TV's live debate on Tuesday resembled a fight in a pub car park at times.

The pity is that there is a serious debate which desperately needs to take place about the constitutional position of the monarchy. The Windsors' own private think-tank the Way Ahead Group has started the ball rolling with its suggestions in August 1996 on disestablishing the Church of England and scrapping the Civil List. Lord Archer has placed the issue on the Lords' agenda with his bill to end male primogeniture in the succession to the throne. Labour's plans for ending hereditary peers' right to vote highlights the issue further. My own Fabian pamphlet *Long to Reign Over Us?* in a small way, attempted to move things on.

The issues of the monarchical powers exercised by the Prime Minister using the Royal Prerogative (including choosing the date of the next election); the role of the Crown and Commonwealth; the increasingly unpalatable financial arrangements; whether or not Buckingham Palace should stay open to the public after the five-year experiment ends next year; whether replacing *Britannia* at a cost of £100m is the most cost-effective way to support British exports: all these issues need airing in an informed and dispassionate manner, and politicians, who ultimately will take the decisions, must take the lead.

PAUL RICHARDS
London W6

Sir: Surely it was in *The Independent* that I read, only a few weeks ago, that phone-in polls were now being seen as a useless technique for assessing public opinion. "About time too," I thought, silently congratulating *The Independent* on having finally woken up. But today (8 January) you carry a front page news story based on a phone-in poll by Carlton TV on the monarchy.

I am a professional sample survey specialist. In my job we all learnt many years ago, through some famous poll disasters, that self-selected samples are not representative samples and cannot be relied on. Phone-in samples are self-selected. Such polls are just entertainment.

CHRIS SCOTT
London N19

Sir: You have surpassed yourself in the art of negative headlining ("Monarchy should go, says a third of TV poll", 8 January). What can we look forward to on the morning after the election – "Tories must stay, says a quarter of the electorate"? PAUL DANEMAN
London SW15

Sir: By no stretch of the imagination could Tuesday night's television programme on the future of the monarchy be dignified by the title of "debate". It was an unsupervised free-for-all and the public figures on both sides who took part must surely regret that they did.

However the result of the telephone poll did mirror the results of other recent polls, finding that two-thirds of the country still want a monarchy. But there should be no complacency at the Palace, for



more to the point one-third of the people now want a republic – an alarming increase for a movement that until a short time ago was regarded as a small, fringe group of crackpots.

ROBERT READMAN
Sandbanks, Dorset

Sir: My wife and I loyally voted (several times) for a constitutional monarchy. However, our Labrador voted republican. Such was the accuracy of this travesty of a referendum.

C D SMITH
Danby, North Yorkshire

Take a punt on democracy
Sir: Camelot's recent advertisement, "A general election every day" was no doubt in jest, but actually they have built a system that could collect a vote from all those entitled, on such issues as the single European currency, proportional representation and the reform of the House of Lords.

Most of the adult population know how to select their numbers on a lottery card and could do something similar to register a vote. Conveniently there is a Camelot terminal nearer to most of us than our local polling station. I expect Camelot would be willing to collect the votes and process them for 5p each, their normal cut of your lottery pound. This would cost a lot less than renting all those schools and paying the returning officers. I trust that front-bench spokesmen on information technology on both sides of the House are actively looking at this opportunity to bring greater

democracy to us all at an affordable price.

JOHN LANE
London WC2

Sir: Is there any way in which I can place my vote now, then cancel all newspapers and switch off all radio and TV news programmes until after the election?

G O JONES
Oxford

A charter for the outdoors

Sir: Stephen Goodwin's article (30 December) on the supposed rift between climbers and ramblers outlines some of the proposals in the British Mountaineering Council's Access Charter, but omits others.

The Charter does not simply echo the arguments of landowners; after 25 years' experience of negotiating access arrangements to cliffs and mountain areas, the BMC knows that negotiation and reasonable agreements are essential to secure access to the wider countryside, and therefore they are part of the BMC package of proposals that includes new legislation. The Access Charter clearly argues that there should be freedom of access to open country. It is therefore a charter for all climbers, hill-walkers, and mountaineers.

However, an approach based on blanket legislation and a definition of open country would not cover all parts of the countryside (for example Labour's current proposals do not include headland, river

banks, forests, cliffs, and foreshore). The BMC supports an approach to open country that acknowledges that there is currently freedom of access (if not a formal right) over large areas of mountain and moorland; and that where access is unreasonably prevented, local and national park authorities should secure access through powers which have existed for 50 years (under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949) but have remained largely unused.

The Ramblers Association has produced a formula for securing new access in the form of a draft Bill; the BMC has always been concerned about the restrictive nature and cost of such an approach. The BMC Charter is a constructive contribution to this debate and I hope the RA will accept it as such.

GEORGE BAND
President
British Mountaineering Council
Manchester

Eurofunds

Sir: Your leader (31 December) implies that the European Movement is in whole funded by the European Union. The European Movement's funding comes from its members and supporters. It receives a tiny amount from the European Commission – less than 5 per cent of our budget in 1995-96. That money is earmarked for information purposes.

ROBERT COPPINGER
Young European Movement
Little Stokeley, Cambridgeshire

Shot, but not poisoned

Sir: Bob Lang (letter, 7 January) raised concerns over the continued use of lead shot in wildfowling and its effect on the environment. It has been reported that the lives of 3 million ducks and geese are claimed worldwide per year through lead poisoning.

Many countries, for example Denmark, Finland and the United States, have introduced legislation preventing the use of lead shot over wetlands. In the UK a voluntary ban is in place, in an attempt to create an effective ban no lead from September 1997. If this is judged successful it will prevent statutory controls being introduced.

Various non-toxic cartridges have been produced, and the most widely available contain steel shot. Steel is a much harder material than lead, with greater risks of ricochet and damage to gun barrels. Steel therefore has a limited popularity among wildfowlers.

Other non-toxic shot types are being developed, and cartridges containing pure tin shot have recently been introduced. Tin is non-toxic, has been used as a replacement for lead in fishing weights since 1986, and is a soft material similar to lead.

KAY NIMMO
International Tin Research Institute
Uxbridge
Middlesex

IRA 'political prisoners'

Sir: Boyd Tonkin ("Helen's game", 9 January) criticises the film *Some Mother's Son* for shying away from the real issues in Northern Ireland. He then shies away from the issue at the heart of the hunger-strike – the fight by republican prisoners to retain the political status (officially termed "special category status") that had been accorded them and others since 1972.

To say that the British government had "toughened their prison regime" or "stripped them of privileges" makes it sound as though they were concerned about bawling toasters and tellies in their cells. Of course the strike was about much more. In the words of a song sung by the prisoners themselves: "I'll wear no convict's uniform Nor meekly serve my time That Britain might brand Ireland's fight Eight hundred years of crime."

N D MARTIN-CLARK
London WC1

Thank you

Sir: I am writing on behalf of the NSPCC to thank everyone who gave so generously to *The Independent's* "Victims of Abuse" Christmas appeal. This year we need to raise nearly £46m to support our work with children at risk from abuse and neglect. The money donated by *Independent* readers will help to enable us to continue this vital work with children and their families.

JIM HARDING
Director and Chief Executive
The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
London EC2

Internet shops not open just yet

Sir: I would like to pour reality on to the increasing hype written about the imminence of electronic home-shopping (report, 6 January). I write as a director of The Food Ferry, central London's home-delivery supermarket, which has been trading profitably since 1990.

There have been many services successfully offering telephone and fax grocery services across the UK for years – because consumers are happy to use these systems and they are quick and user-friendly. But for electronic retailing to take off in 1997 there will have to be an almighty Big Bang.

Over the past two years The Food Ferry has been involved in several trials, set up enthusiastically with the software departments of four multinationals. For a variety of consumer-based reasons each one has failed to take off. Meanwhile, trade derived from conventional telephone and fax orders via boring old catalogues continues to increase vigorously.

The tide will gently turn towards electronic retailing as consumers become more accustomed to new technologies. The Food Ferry will remain closely involved at all stages. For now, the approach must be practical. The real poser is: are the multitude of consumers who wish to make home-delivery orders the same as those who are comfortable with using the electronic retail systems on offer? We firmly say, not in 1997.

JAMES MILLAR
London SW11

Sir: Soon, we are told, we'll be able to order our groceries from supermarkets on the Internet and get them delivered for £4. What a splendid idea! Very reminiscent of the system which operated not many years ago, when we could telephone the grocer in the high street, order our groceries, and get them delivered for nothing.

That was before the supermarket chains killed off the grocer's business. And after the grocers: who next? Messengers and petrol stations are in their sights already.

F E CARD
Barnetree, Essex

Toll of legal abortions

Sir: Dr Ann Dally (letters 7 January) cites a figure of 250,000 back-street abortions prior to the 1967 Abortion Act. By this reckoning the Act saves about 80,000 foetal lives a year. But where does this constantly recurring figure of 250,000 come from? Can Dr Dally cite any report supporting her claim?

An article in the *British Medical Journal* of 2 April 1966 (pp 850-55) entitled "Legalised abortion: report by the Council of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists" states that figures of 250,000, 100,000 or even 50,000 criminal abortions in 1966 are "without any secure factual foundation of which we are aware".

Given the number of fatalities due to criminal abortion, the report calculated that the figure of 100,000 criminal abortions would mean a mortality rate for mothers of 0.3 per 1,000, a rate superior to the best hospitals of the time.

The conclusion is that far from saving lives, at least 70,000 more lives are being lost because of the 1967 Abortion Act.

WILLIAM NEWTON
Woking, Surrey

argument

Hands up all those who favour a gigantic ferris wheel opposite the House of Commons as a sensible way of marking the millennium. How about an enormous tower block bigger than any other in Europe? Or maybe that dustbin-like device that Lord Rogers wants to build at Greenwich, the purpose of which has yet to be decided, but look at the size.

I have just outlined three of the most "exciting" proposals for commemorating the turn of 2,000 years of civilisation – but I don't suppose more than a handful of punters have signalled their approval.

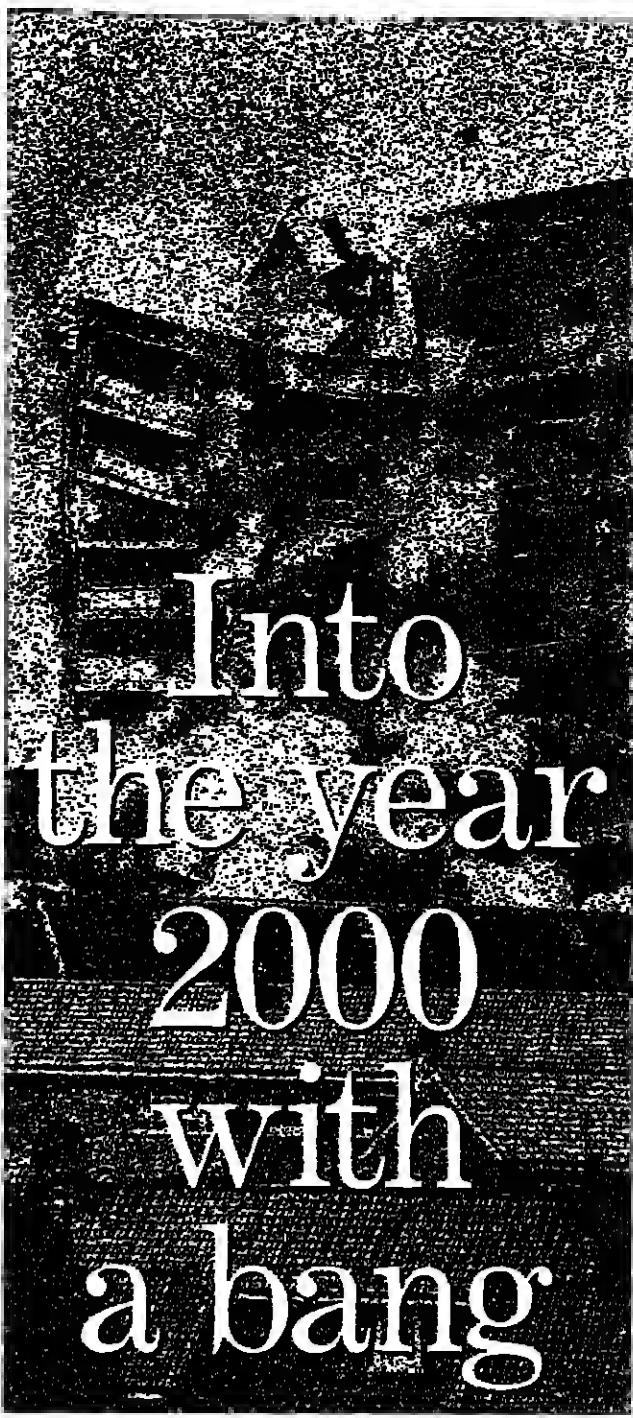
Here is a suggestion. Rather than thrashing around for some great construction with which to summarise the elusive spirit of the age, we should turn this quest on its head... and knock down something instead. There is nothing like a bit of rubble for summarising the angst of an era. Pass the dynamite, strike up a Swan Vestia. Boom!

There are many reasons for destroying eyesore buildings, not least the removal of blots that we had presumed more or less indestructible. But my main concern is a regard for space itself. Each year, England loses 11,000 hectares of rural landscape to urban development. That means a slab of land about the size of Bristol going up the Swansea. Between now and the millennium, we will see three new Britains. By the year 2016 this will amount to an area the size of Greater London.

According to a study by the Council for the Protection of Rural England, over the past 30 years this roaring onrush of development has cut the amount of space where you can find peace and quiet by almost 19,000 sq kms. We're running out.

Meanwhile our cities, in which more than 80 per cent of the population lives, are clearly not satisfying their inhabitants. In the past 20 years, an average of 300 people a day have quit city life to swell the edges of towns and villages, thus negating the resource they are seeking.

We must put a fresh value on space. Not as a useable asset, but as a necessity and, in this case, a symbol. We have to deny the usual supremacy of material values... by basing up a great big bulding. Just take away... and leave a space. It would be a shake, a shock. An opening up – literally and metaphorically – of new views. I put the idea to eight senior architects in some of our major



Should we dynamite the worst of British buildings? Nicholas Roe thinks so, and eight architects tell him what would head their list of the country's greatest eyesores

cities and they lapped it up. In fact, they supplied a mouth-watering parade of candidate buildings for the commemorative chop.

Rod Hackney, former president of the Royal Institute of British Architects and sometime adviser to the Prince of Wales, opted instantly for the battered Arndale Centre in Manchester. "When the IRA bombed it," he said, "the only solace for a lot of people was that they had chosen the ugliest building in the city. Every one thought it would be demolished because it was beyond repair. But having now spent more on repair than on building it in the Sixties, that clearly won't happen."

Is sin? "It is an out-of-town shopping centre in the middle of a city. A city is not just about shopping, it is also a civic state-

ment where people come together to advance civilisation. To ignore quality and manners in urban style is rude. The Arndale Centre does all that."

So to Bath, where Richard Feilden of Feilden Clegg Associates also had no doubts selecting the Hilton Hotel on the edge of the city centre. "It is," he judged, "a totally unadorned slab from the early Sixties with a complete lack of proportions. If you look down on the city, the single most noticeable feature after the Abbey is this wretched hotel built in cast stone. It isn't even proper stone."

Owen Luder, president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, selected for London the Elephant and Castle shopping centre, which sits plinkily on the Elephant round-

about. "It never did work and it's an eyesore."

In Birmingham, Tony Lloyd of Peter Hing and Jones chose the Copthorne Hotel at the bottom of Centenary Square. "A glass box," he sneered. "It could have been a sparkling jewel, but it's a bit of a black hole. If there was some open space there it would make a nice green lung around the library."

In Coventry, Michael Partridge of Michael Partridge Partnership chose a 10-year-old shop and office development in Broadgate that crassly obscures a view of the ancient cathedral tower from the pedestrian precinct.

In Newcastle, Warren Barnett of Ian Darby Partnerships picked two early Seventies office blocks at the bottom of the city's Bigg Market which hog the site of the old town hall (a fine Georgian building, they say). "You would think I could be at any horrible down-town business area," says Barnett. "It's smoked glass, steps, brick and glass at ground level, brick panelling above that. If the buildings were not there, you would be looking at St Nicholas Cathedral and part of the old castle and part of Gateshead. There's no civic centre, it was never designed, so this could become the piazza."

Stephen Hodder, the Manchester-based winner of this year's £20,000 Stirling Prize for

architecture, was at first waspishly specific – he chose the Meadowhall shopping centre in Sheffield – but then raised his sights. "All out of town shopping centres," he added. "Meadowhall, Gateshead Metro, Lakeside on the M25... the problem is that they are such huge retail units, surrounded by seas of cars. The architectural expression is inevitably a veneer, and that veneer is whatever is fashionable at the time. What we should be thinking about is the 24-hour city. Out-of-town centres contribute specifically to the decay of cities, revving up the exodus that gobbles up more prized space."

Finally, the Sussex and London architect Michael Hymas chose Churchill Square, another eyesore in the centre of Brighton. "It's a complete utter disaster," he raged. "You could have had a wonderful terrace space on that site, possibly with open vistas of the sea. Instead, they built a windswept, bleak place that is ugly and unexciting. In fact they are redeveloping it, but I'm sure it will just be a classic Nineties shopping mall – a mini-Arndale on a potentially brilliant site."

The links between all these buildings glare from the detail. Every one is modern. Most are shop or leisure developments. The choices say something about an agreement of taste, and something else about the links between materialism and modern culture. If readers agree that our urban and rural space could be improved by the elimination of old eyesores rather than the construction of new ones, I am sure *The Independent's* Letters Editor would be happy to hear their suggestions.

Tear down terraces, shopping centres, the lot

The prevailing British obsession with the notion of heritage means that all buildings are of historic merit, no matter how ugly, and so none should be demolished. Try to knock down a banal Sixties office block in Neasden and a prim young conservationist will decry the act, baring us with the fact that this grim building is the sole surviving work of the Dollis Hill architects Sleaze & Largefee, and moreover, is a unique example of bogged-frame construction.

Forced to play the which-buildings-would-you-like-to-demolish game, my own reply is that much British building from the 1830s to the present has been unspeakably ugly and ought to go. Why the 1830s? Because it was from this date that we began to smother Britain in mass-produced buildings – hideous rows of pinched, mean villas for Postmen and Gradgrinds that today's middle-classes think quite super; mean-spirited churches, grim warehouses and then a superfluity of offices, an inundation of industrial tat and finally, over the past 25 years, the triumphal banality of supermarkets, shopping malls, business parks, country park hotels, golf clubs and motorway service stations. Even if many of these buildings have been more or less inevitable, there are many I would love to drive a bulldozer through. I would aim first for the disfiguring acres of Victorian terraced houses that choke south London and many other British cities. These have none of the simple, beautifully proportioned elegance of their Georgian predecessors: they speak only of an England mean, grey and horribly repressed.

All cul-de-sacs, post-1939 and the Joke Oak and Neo-Geo houses that sprout inside them would be razed and replaced by pastures, woodlands and meadows: those who live in them could come back to town, or emigrate to Canada, where there is plenty of space for the twin-garage lifestyle. All retirement homes for the over-55s, all supermarkets and all edge-of-town retail developments would be trampled underground.

Ninety-nine per cent of Vernacular-style homes built, with good intent, by housing associations and

caring, sharing community architects over the past 25 years would have to go. Little Chefs and Happy Eaters, Travelodges and Novotels would be zapped from the roadscape. Birmingham New Street, Birmingham International and Milton Keynes stations would bite the dust and be replaced by buildings proud to acknowledge that they had something to do with railways, Gatwick airport and all its themed cafés would be demolished, as would the whole of Heathrow.

Moving into town, the St James's shopping centre in Edinburgh, Wembley Conference Centre in west London, Camden Town Hall opposite St Pancras station, the Public Records Office in Kew and the Ark office block beside the Hammersmith flyover would come tumbling down. I would blast the recent buildings defacing the Thames near the former Bankside Power Station (these include cheque-clearing centres for banks among other arcane and bureaucratic purposes) and those screening St Paul's cathedral from the River Thames opposite Bankside.

Richmond Riverside, the faux Classical office and shopping complex some miles west along the Thames and designed by St Quintan Terry, would be sacked; in fact, any bogus Post-Modern classical twaddle would be banished, especially any building described as "witty".

I would root up pedestrian precincts, their girn-crack berring-bone brick pavements, heritage-style streetlamps and those horrid brick obstructions known as "planters" in which a few sad shrubs attempt to bloom and that serve best as receptacles for beer cans and greasy hamburger cartons.

This is just a start. Over the past 150 years, we have built so very much that it is no wonder that so many buildings are bland or horrid. Not every building ought to be a monument or masterpiece, because we would soon tire of architectural richness as we do of Christmas pudding and chocolate-covered figs, but those we do need might be designed and built with care and imagination.

Jonathan Glancey, Architecture Correspondent



Candidates for demolition: left, Bigg Market, Newcastle; centre top, Victorian terraces; middle, neo-Georgian executive estates; lower left, Richmond Riverside development; above, Churchill Square, Brighton; below, buildings hiding St Paul's cathedral

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Martians like a bet, predictably enough

Yesterday I brought you part of the current trial in which Drew Webster, accused of shoplifting in Croydon, pleads not guilty on the grounds that he was on the planet Mars at the time, at a party. More of this trail-blazing case today.

Counsel: You have already told the court that you work as a Hugh Grant look-alike... Webster: That is correct. Counsel: On July 17th last year, a man closely resembling Hugh Grant was arrested in Dixons of Croydon with a Sony CD Player under his coat. Webster: Perhaps it was Hugh Grant. Counsel: I think not. He was in California at the time. Webster: He was closer to Croydon than I was, in that case. I was on Mars, don't forget. Counsel: Do you seriously ask the court to believe that an actor of Hugh Grant's standing would sink to petty crime? Webster: He has done it once. He would do it again. Judge: When you say that Hugh Grant has previously been involved in petty crime, are you referring to...?

Counsel: Yes, m'lud. Judge: I see. Right, carry on. Counsel: Now, Mr Webster, this party you were at on Mars. Could you describe it? Webster: It was just an ordinary sort of Martian party. Counsel: For the benefit of those of us who have never attended a Martian party, could you elaborate a little? Webster: Well, it was okay to start with, but then the drink ran out and the neighbours began to complain about the noise, so most people went home but a few of us younger ones slipped down the corner for a quick Venusian. Counsel: A quick Venusian? Webster: Yes. A meal at the local Venusian restaurant. Venusian restaurants stay open later than most do on Mars, and the service is quick. Counsel: What's the food like? Webster: Not bad, if you like spicy cooking. Counsel: And then? Webster: And then I fell asleep, and when I woke up, I was home in bed in Croydon. Counsel: It is possible – just possible – that there may be a germ of truth in this story. It is also possible that you have



Miles Kingston

been watching too many X Files. Webster: I have never seen the programme. Counsel: Never? Webster: Never. The night it is on, I usually go to Mars. Counsel: Is there any evidence you could offer to support your highly unlikely story about a trip to Mars? Webster: I would like to call a witness. Counsel: Who would that be? Webster: A Martian called Tin-Tack, who was with me at the party and would testify that I was there, too. Counsel: Call Tin-Tack! Cries

off-stage of "Call Tin-Tack!" There is a long pause. Nothing happens. No sign of him. I'm afraid, Mr Webster. Webster: On the contrary, sir. He is here. Counsel: I see nothing. Webster: That is because Martians make themselves invisible and inaudible to those they do not trust. But I can see him perfectly clearly, and hear him, too. Counsel: Then perhaps you would care to ask your Martian friend whether he will testify to your alibi. Webster: Certainly. Tin-Tack was I or was I not at the party with you on the afternoon of July 17th last year, Earth time? Another long pause. Judge: What does he say? Webster: It's a bit embarrassing, m'lud. Judge: I don't care. What does your Martian friend say? Webster: He said: "Never mind about the party – have you put the money on yet?" Judge: What on earth does that mean? Webster: My Lord, you must realise that the Martians have the gift of foretelling the future. For this reason, they have no gambling or betting on Mars. There is no point in wagering on the future when

you already know the future. They already know, for instance, the result of the next British election. Judge: Not a lot of use to them, is it? Webster: Not a lot on Mars, m'lud. But on Earth, where you can bet on such things... Judge: Ah! I think I see now. Webster: Exactly. Tin-Tack and his friends gave me a lot of money to bring back to Earth and place at the bookmaker's on the result of the next election. Judge: Hmm. And have you placed the bet yet? Webster: Not yet. It is difficult to change Martian money, for a start. For another thing, it may be difficult to persuade the bookie to accept their forecast as a realistic bet. Judge: Why? What do they think will happen at the next election? Webster: My lips are sealed, m'lud. Judge: Not in my court they aren't. Court adjourned! Mr Webster, come to my room and write down on a bit of the paper the result of the next election, and then we will phone my bookmaker... More of this unusual case some other time, perhaps.

صلى الله عليه وسلم

A tax on the rich that delivers few votes and less revenue

So it looks as though Tony Blair has won his argument with Gordon Brown over the top rate of income tax. We will have to wait a few weeks more for confirmation, but it seems that the plan supported by the shadow Chancellor, to increase the top rate of tax from 40 per cent to 50 per cent for incomes of more than £100,000, will not now go ahead. Mr Blair apparently felt that it gave the wrong signal about Labour's tax intentions. But there is an even more powerful reason than Mr Blair's political judgement for opposing the idea. It is the possibility that, far from increasing tax revenue, it might actually cut it. Most people would assume that if you put tax rates up, people pay more tax. For most taxes and most people that is probably true. But for the particular group of people who might be hit, this may not be right. To see why, here are some very rough calculations which show on various assumptions the extent to which any additional revenue would be offset by other declines.

The starting point is the Inland Revenue calculation that implementing this top rate of tax on all earnings over £100,000 would raise an additional £1.1bn in revenue. That may sound a lot, though it is actually only a third of 1 per cent of public spending. It seems astonishing, but that calculation is based on the assumption that there would be no change at all in people's behaviour as a result of the tax increase. That is unrealistic, for there are bound to be some changes, and these changes are going to cut revenue. So that £1.1bn is an absolute maximum. The real total will be lower.

Start, then, with the £1.1bn. The people who might pay can avoid it in one of two (legal) ways. They can either leave the UK tax net altogether, or they can change their tax arrangements to cut nominal income. The first question is: how many people might leave?

There are about 120,000 people who have a taxable income of more than £100,000. Not many of those either have the opportunity or would want to go to the upheaval of moving abroad just because of income tax. The main group of people who emigrate for tax reasons are those selling businesses and retiring, and they are avoiding inheritance and capital gains tax rather than income tax. But some people might take the rise in income tax as a signal that other taxes might also be increased and act accordingly. Others might be trying to reach a decision and this would be the thing which pushed them over.

So let us assume that, within a couple of years, 2 per cent of those high earners, 2,400 people, would leave. That may be too high or too low, but it is at least a figure. For those people, the Exchequer loses all tax: not just the income tax that they would have paid, but their capital gains tax, the VAT on their purchases, what they spend on petrol, the council tax, and so on. Let us assume, too, that these tend to be richer than the average of the 120,000: that they have been earning £200,000 and paying a total of, say, £100,000 a year in all forms of taxation. That knocks £240m off revenues.

Next, look at the people who stay in the country, but change their habits. There are two possibilities here. One is simply to earn less. Some people who were going to retire soon



Hamish McRae

Gordon Brown's 50 per cent top tax rate would probably have failed as high earners emigrated or used loopholes

might decide to do so three or four years earlier than they planned. Others might trade money for lifestyle: leave the high-pressure job in the City and work for a charity. Let us assume that another 2 per cent of the 120,000 opt for a change of lifestyle and that their tax payments fall by, say, £50m.

The other change of habit is less radical, for it involves using the various available tax loopholes more thoroughly. Most high-earners are probably already using their full pension allowances, but not all will be. Assume that this prods most of those laggards into action, and that, at the margin, some high earners opt for other non-salaried benefits instead of more cash. A whole industry exists developing such reward packages, but at 40 per cent many people prefer the convenience of cash. Assume, too, that a rather higher proportion of taxpayers buys into tax-favoured investments such as enterprise investment trusts. If, on average, each of the 120,000 people managed on average to chip £5,000 off their tax bill in this way, that would be a further cut of £60m in revenues.

Add this up and you can see that a third of the additional revenue raised by the tax increase would very plausibly slide away. This direct loss might be much more: it is certainly hard to see it being less.

On top of this are the second-order effects: the impact on people who would not pay the tax, but fear that they might at some future stage find themselves doing so. The present top rate of 40 per cent pays £30bn of the total £70bn income tax revenue. Any increase in income tax will focus attention on the various opportunities everyone has to cut their bill – typically by making sure that they take up their full pension allowances. If higher-rate payers chipped just 1 per cent off their tax bill by exploiting these schemes, that would be another £300m off revenues. Suddenly two-thirds of the expected gain from the tax increase is lost.

So, on these pretty cautious assumptions, after a couple of years, when people had had time to adjust their behaviour, the additional revenue would not be £1.1bn, but more like £300m to £350m. It might well be less. If one makes more radical assumptions about likely changes in people's habits, you could find the government actually losing revenue.

No one can prove this, because no one can predict how behaviour will change. But we do know from phenomena, such as the unexpected surge in cross-Channel booze imports, that once people get it into their heads that they can avoid a tax, they will race to do so. If they think tax rates are being increased for largely symbolic reasons, then the impetus to avoid those higher rates is all the greater.

All the talk of a higher top tax rate will already have done some damage. Anyone who moves in these circles will know people who have moved out of the UK in the past year or so in case Labour puts up taxes. If Mr Blair has now imposed his will on his colleagues, then it will be because he recognises that higher tax rates are the wrong symbol. But he and his friends should take comfort from the fact that what makes electoral sense also makes practical sense. Holding rates at a relatively low level actually underpins the government's future revenue base, not the reverse.

Heroes must do more than entertain us

by Suzanne Moore

In 1911 Charlotte Perkins Gilman described what a hero must look like. "He may be cross-eyed, wide-eyed, thick-necked, bandy-legged – what you please; but he must have a more or less protruding jaw". What a glorious week it has been for determined jaws. They have jutted out at us from television screens and the front pages of every newspaper. While the only women currently deemed newsworthy are Baby Spice, John McCarthy's girlfriend and the despised Camilla Parker-Bowles, daredevil businessmen, round-the-world yachtsmen and of course the man who is "hugger than God", the messiah himself, Kevin Keegan, are everywhere.

I realise that it is heresy these days to regard football as mere sport, rather than an organised religion as well as the surest indicator of national self-worth, but then I'm just a girl. Boy's own fantasies have not just dominated the news, they are the news. Men who choose to mess about with boats, balloons and balls are presented as the embodiment of all our hopes, as an inspiration to us all.

Let me play the bad fairy at the ball, then, and say that none of these guys are an inspiration to me. Sure, they may be good at what they do: they may take huge risks and live under considerable pressures. But heroes? Please. Richard Branson may be a popular figure for both the left and right. Someone should give him a proper job. He may be a brilliant self-publicist, but what did his ballooning enterprise actually represent apart from the triumph of private entrepreneurship?

Branson was not only prepared to risk his life but others, too. He will probably try it again. We are to be persuaded that he "is the last of the great British buccanniers". He needs adventure, we are told, and we need adventures. We need to be reminded what individuals are capable of. We need these oddballs to attempt things that we would never dream of. Branson's personal courage reminds us that business isn't boring, but full of derring-do. This may help the self-image of a few "suits", but I'm afraid it does nothing for me.

Every weekend, people of all persuasions attach themselves to lines of elastic and throw themselves off cranes. They do it for the thrill, the adrenaline, the fun. No one describes bungee-jumping as heroic or as contributing to the national pride. No elements are being conquered, no lands explored, no books arise out of the spiritual journey it entails. Is this fundamentally any more daft than the exploits of a Ranulph Fiennes, who must invent increasingly pointless expeditions to put himself through?

Buccanniers, you see, are running out of things to buck.



If men really want to know about pushing oneself to the limits, about physical pain and endurance, they could try giving birth

Everything has been discovered, circumnavigated, survived single-handedly. Their adventures are increasingly artificial, man-made if you like. There is little left for them to pit their minds and bodies against except ludicrous records that most of us care nothing about anyway.

The *Guinness Book of Records* is riveting when you are 10 years old, but surely its appeal lessens as one reaches middle age. If it doesn't – and for some strange reason, for a certain breed of men and the long-distance walker Fyona Campbell this appears to be the case – then in order to prove one's uniqueness, one has to undertake a vastly expensive adventure.

If the outer world has already been conquered, then the inner world becomes the

new frontier. Physical hardship combined with the ability to endure solitude becomes the new territory to be annexed. There may well be courageous activities involved, but they are inherently selfish ones, contributing little to the general culture.

Yet we continue to make a distinction between those who choose to risk their otherwise cosy lives and those who starve, who are tortured, whose everyday lives are full of horrendous challenges, as if heroism were only the property of those who can afford to make such choices.

Likewise, we assume that the stresses of the mega-successful are somehow greater than those of the anonymous failures. Stress, living in the spotlight, the trappings of fame itself are spoken of as the final test of a man. I don't doubt that

Kevin Keegan was a good football manager or that he was under pressure, but he was well rewarded for it.

Was his stress greater than that of an inner-city schoolteacher, a junior doctor who has worked solidly for 36 hours, a lone mother worrying about how she will pay for her children's birthday presents? Is it a national tragedy when a man decides to quit a high-profile job "for the sake of his family"?

or should Keegan be more like Branson, who is happy to leave his to fly around the world in a balloon? Is Tony Bullimore, who thankfully was found alive, essentially any braver than a fireman who crawls into blazing buildings? And as many women have mattered to each other over the past few days, if men really want to know about pushing oneself to the limits, about physical pain and endurance, they could try giving birth.

Despite heroic efforts by the media, the other thing that is jarring about these action men is that they have basically failed. Branson's balloon came down; Bullimore's boat lost the race; Keegan had enough. Failure, however, is something that the prevalent mythology does not acknowledge. These men must immediately promise to have another go. The lexicon of boy's own adventure does not countenance failure. Nothing ventured, nothing gained translates into nothing gained, nothing learnt.

Some adventures, however, are not just prepared to admit failure but to learn from it, even to explore it, for in exploring their relationships with themselves they are also exploring their relationships with others. When Robyn Davidson went to live for a year among the nomads of India, she ended up ill with TB and tapeworm, angry and frightened. She writes in her book *Desert Places*: "Everything I had done here was fraudulent and absurd... And I would perpetuate this fraudulence by producing another useless artefact for western consumption, another bit of noise for a culture drowning in noise – an article for a glossy magazine with beautiful photos of beautiful India, beautiful noble Rahari, so that people could sit in the comfort of their homes or doctors' waiting-rooms and not see." Yet despite her experience "of a series of disconnected events, without shape or meaning," she expresses a desire to go back. "Because where I come from, life wasn't hard enough, or dangerous enough, to demand greatness of individuals."

Our privileged heroes might say the same, that they seek to find greatness for themselves by seeking danger. Others may applaud them for enriching our lives by risking theirs, but some of us must wonder if there aren't greater and profoundly more life-enhancing causes to die for than Richard Branson's ballooning ego.

A nose for a bargain? Go private

So this is how normal people breathe! For the first time in 30-something years the flow of air up my left nostril is unimpeded. The nasal twang I had always associated with my Scouse origins has diminished, and other people's snoring is no longer disturbed by my occasional snoring.

I underwent my nose job – definitely not cosmetic, but structural – seven weeks ago. It was my first encounter, as a customer, with private medicine. I am delighted with the result, but disturbed by what I discovered en route to normal service resumed in what my surgeon described as "the most congested nostril I have ever seen".

When I was a baby I was dropped nose first on to a coffee table. I grew up as one of those adenoidal little girls who never quite made it to the top of the NHS waiting list to have them – my adenoids – whipped out, as was the fashion.

My accident had pushed the septum (the central partition inside the nose) to one side, and my nose had never developed normally as a result. I opened normally as a result. I finally got an appointment at a London teaching hospital after a three-month wait. The problem, I was told by the consultant ear, nose and throat surgeon, could be rectified with a simple operation. "I'll put you on the waiting list," he said.



Liz Hunt

If you decide to jump the NHS queue and pay for surgery, you find yourself in a jungle. Be a 'consumer' and shop around

The waiting list was nine to 12 months long, possibly longer if the winter of 1996-97 turned out to be a bad one and non-emergency operations were cancelled. I was half-way to the door of his office before I asked tentatively what it would cost to have it done privately.

"Do you have private health insurance?" he asked. I didn't. Suddenly I was transformed into a much more interesting patient. My consultant's eyes really did light up as he replied: "About £2,000. Here is my card with the numbers for my private rooms. Call me tomorrow."

I rang the next day, expecting to speak to the surgeon's secretary about fees. But I got Mr X himself on the line, his manner only a little more oily than the day before, and he called me "Elizabeth" at every opportunity. "Well, Elizabeth, I've done a few calculations and the cheapest package I can come up with is £2,500. We can't do it as a day case, Elizabeth, so you will have to stay overnight in hospital, and of course that pushes up the price."

"And you may need some plastic surgery to prevent your nose 'dropping' after we take out the cartilage, Elizabeth, and then there are the drugs you'll need afterwards. It is £860 up front payable to the hospital, Elizabeth, and then the rest after the operation." He urged me to book my bed

immediately because hospitals filled up fast before Christmas. "Face lifts and tummy tucks for the party season," he said. I felt I had no choice.

But how could the price have jumped by £500 overnight? I told a doctor friend, who said I had probably been marked out as a potential "private" the moment I walked into the consultant's room. I was advised to ring round some private hospitals and get quotes, and to negotiate if necessary.

The cost started to fall immediately: £2,200 at one hospital; £1,600 plus surgeon and anaesthetist's fees at another (about £2,000); between £1,200 and £1,600 at the third I tried.

I made an appointment with a consultant at the last, a private hospital in south-west London. The surgeon said he could do the operation as a day case, no problem. When I asked him about the plastic surgery I needed to prevent my nose "dropping" he laughed and said that only happened in about one in 1,000 cases.

What about the expensive drugs I would need afterwards? Some ephedrine nose drops would help, he admitted, "but salt water splashed up your nostrils a few times is probably the best thing."

I was sent to the accounts office to finalise the fees. This was not straightforward. The financial officer consulted her

book of "package deals" and said that, unfortunately, there was no set price for the three procedures I needed, and that they wouldn't do it as a day case anyway. "But Mr Y said he could do it as a day case," I said.

She was adamant that this was not possible. "Well, what would it cost with an overnight stay?" She could not tell me that either, because "we don't know what would be used in the operating theatre", etc. Her solution was for me to pay a £1,100 deposit and settle the extras after the operation. But what extras, and how much more for them? She didn't know, but consoled me with the prize of an itemised bill after my operation. "People really like that, you know," she said soothingly. "It lists everything."

I had heard about bills dishied out by private hospitals: £12 for a sticking plaster, £7 for a piece of gauze, and £30 for a bottle of talcum powder. Sainsbury's provide you with an "itemised bill", but at least you know in advance what you are paying per item. Time to get tough. "I've come to this hospital because you told me you can do this operation more cheaply than anyone else – but you can't tell me how much more cheaply," I stormed out.

She followed me, saying that she would talk to her boss. By the time I reached home, there was a message from the boss:

ital offering a £1,200 package deal for a day-case operation, plus £400 to cover the costs of the surgeon and the anaesthetist. It was a £900 saving on that first quote from Mr X, and I had a feeling of triumph at beating a system that I'd never have thought of challenging.

The Government prides itself on having transformed NHS patients into consumers of health care in the past decade. In the private sector they have always been consumers, but have behaved like patients. Perhaps it is time for a change?

The medical establishment – the British Medical Association and the General Medical Council – fiercely opposes consumer guides, such as *The Good Doctor Guide*, that aim to tell patients who the best doctors are in a particular speciality. The fact that 1,000 doctors have agreed to be included in the third edition of the guide, the first national edition of which was published this week, suggests that some of them at least agree that this is the least a patient is entitled to, despite the threat of disciplinary action. Which of those "good doctors" gives the best value for money is surely the next thing we need to know.

The Good Doctor Guide, by Catherine Vassallo, is published by Simon & Schuster at £14.99.

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BZW's £6m man needs to produce some results fast

Bill Harrison, recently appointed chief executive at Barclays investment banking arm, BZW, is a man in a hurry. And well he needs to be, for according to banking analysts, BZW remains a comparatively poorly performing investment bank, even after a boom year in capital markets which has seen many City traders transformed into millionaires.

Suggestions in the City that he has already had one business plan torn up and thrown back in his face are vehemently denied both by Barclays and BZW. But this has failed to bury rumours of growing concern at Barclays head office over poor re-

Lacklustre performance is worrying the City, despite Bill Harrison's hiring and firing. Jill Treanor reports

turns and strategy in investment banking.

Mr Harrison, a 48-year-old plain-talking Brummie, was lured from Robert Fleming, the merchant bank, this summer on a pay deal worth £6m over five years. He arrived just after Bob Diamond, the other key recruit in the new-look BZW. Mr Diamond runs global markets in return for a pay deal which is rumoured almost to match that of Mr Harrison.

So far progress has been slow.

John Leonard, a top banking analyst at Salomon Brothers, has cut his pre-tax profits forecast for BZW in the second half of 1996 to £118m, despite the fact that most other investment banks in the City are on track for a record year.

In the first half, before Mr Harrison took the helm after the death of David Band, BZW made profits of £157m, a figure which disappointed some analysts at the time.

According to Mr Leonard, the new regime has so far been finan-

cially negative in its impact - rising costs and falling revenues. Mr Diamond is rumoured to have fired as many as 130 staff and hired the same number again, quite possibly on higher pay deals.

According to insiders, staff have been so busy watching their backs that they have not had time to go out and win business. At the same time key personnel who had developed good relationships with clients have been fired.

Mr Diamond has ousted senior

figures such as Klaus-Peter Moeritz, head of foreign exchange trading in the UK and Europe, and Alex von Ungem-Stenberg, deputy chief executive of the markets division. Others who have gone include Yann Gindre, head of debt origination, Nick Carter, head of swaps marketing, Paul Ellis, head of structured products, and Rob Joffe and Steve Hones joint heads of debt syndicate.

Mr Harrison, meanwhile, has been busy instilling fear in his staff

with his phenomenal appetite for work. He claims, apparently seriously, that time spent at home is a wasted marketing opportunity.

"The personnel changes in BZW's fixed income unit may have at least temporary revenue implications as well as adding to costs," Mr Leonard said in recent research. However, while he has trimmed his forecasts for the entire Barclays group for 1996, he is confident about the bank's performance in 1997 and 1998.

Robert Law, banking analyst at

Lehman Brothers, the US investment bank, also expects costs to rise at BZW. He forecasts a rise of 10 per cent, which will account for most of the cost enhancement of the entire Barclays group.

Costs are also rising because BZW is in the process of moving to new premises in Canary Wharf, analysts point out. All points to a picture of rapidly escalating costs and poor return on capital. But although there may be special factors at work at BZW, this is by no means a unique set of circumstances.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

Insurers fail to cut charges after disclosure

Nic Cicutti

Insurance companies are still refusing to cut charges on the policies they sell, almost two years after new rules forcing costs to be disclosed, the Personal Investment Authority admitted yesterday.

Despite hopes of a price war in the wake of the new disclosure regime in 1995, most companies charge as much on their policies as last year, according to a survey by the PIA. This is in contrast to claims three years ago by the Securities and Investments Board, the senior regulator, that the new disclosure regime would yield annual savings of £1bn for policyholders.

While the average charges imposed by all insurers dropped by 3.9 per cent since the board compared to 12 months ago, this was mostly accounted for by uncompetitive companies whose products are among the least successful commercially.

The vast majority, including Commercial Union, Norwich Union and NPL, have not lowered charges. Several of the more competitive firms until last year, including Allied Dunbar and many Scottish life insurers, have taken advantage of the new disclosure regime to raise their charges to match their rivals.



Colette Bowe: Faces little enthusiasm for competition

Joe Palmer, chairman of the PIA, said in the report: "Although the full impact of the disclosure regime may only fully emerge over time, we still consider this information to be an important part of the PIA's accountability to investors."

The PIA survey, published yesterday, comes amid increasing consumer dissatisfaction with the high charges levied by insurers on their products, including personal pensions.

Harriet Hall, legal officer at the National Consumer Council, said: "A lot of people find the terms used, such as 'reduction in yield', difficult to understand. The purpose of disclosure was

to attempt to get competition going. This now needs careful monitoring to ensure competition does take place."

Ms Hall, however, welcomed the publication of the disclosure document, which she said offered consumers an opportunity to make more informed choices.

The figures also indicate that where companies had the chance to sell their products across several distribution channels, at least one of which was cheaper, they made no attempt to reflect this in the costs imposed on consumers.

Among the firms which have refused to differentiate between the channels selling their pension products are Axa Equity & Law, Clerical Medical, Norwich Union, which is to float on the stock market later this year, and Sun Alliance, now merged with Royal Sun Alliance.

The PIA yesterday refused to comment publicly on this new evidence. But it is understood that the regulator is growing increasingly concerned at the unwillingness of companies to compete within the new climate offered by the disclosure rules introduced under its chief executive Colette Bowe two years ago.

It also broke with past policy by publicly acknowledging for

Personal pensions - how much the big insurers charge

25 Year Unit Linked Personal Pensions, monthly premiums of £50 (assumes annual growth of 9 per cent)

	5-year effect of deductions (£) 1996	maturity reduction in yield - 1996 (%)	5-year effect of deductions (£) 1995	maturity reduction in yield - 1995 (%)
AbbeyLife	1,840	2.1	1,500	2.1
Abbey National Life	1,200	1.8	1,400	1.8
Abbey Life	2,050	2.0	2,053	1.9
Allied Dunbar	1,730	1.8	1,780	1.7
AXA Equity & Law	1,610	2.2	1,610	2.2
Barclays Life	1,120	1.8	1,130	1.8
Black Horse Life	1,500	1.9	1,500	1.9
Britannia Life	1,777	1.8	1,770	1.8
Britannia Assurance	1,250	1.8	1,250 (WP)	1.8 (WP)
Canada Life	1,580	2.1	1,580	2.1
Clerical Medical & General	1,610	2.2	1,610	2.2
Colonial Mutual	1,580	2.1	1,700	2.2
Commercial Union	1,320	1.8	1,320	1.8
Cornhill	1,900	1.8	1,900	1.8
Cooperative Insurance Society	1,270 (WP)	1.2 (WP)	1,340 (WP)	1.2 (WP)
Equitable Life	1,820	1.7	1,820	1.7
Equitable Life	283	0.9	283	0.9
Friends Provident	1,160	1.6	1,170	1.6
General Accident Life	1,280	1.9	1,280	1.8
Guardian Financial Services	1,570	1.9	1,110	1.8
Legal & General	1,640	1.5	1,640	1.5
Lincoln National	1,730	1.9	1,800	1.9
London and Manchester Assurance	1,640	2.2	1,640 (WP)	2.9 (WP)
Midland Life	1,040	1.8	1,040	1.8
National Mutual Life	1,210	1.5	1,110	1.3
National Provident Institution (NPI)	1,080	1.8	1,080	1.8
Norfolk Life	1,110	1.9	1,200	2.0
Norwich Life	1,320	1.8	n.a.	n.a.
Norwich Union	1,408	1.8	1,400	1.5
Pearl	1,350 (WP)	2.3 (WP)	1,430	2.6
Refuge Life	1,400	2.5	1,400	2.5
Reliance Mutual	2,020	2.8	2,000	2.7
Royal Life	1,430	1.5	n.a.	n.a.
Scottish Amicable	1,270	1.8	1,200	1.7
Scottish Equitable	1,600	1.6	1,600	1.6
Scottish Life	1,410	1.8	1,334	1.8
Scottish Mutual	1,920	2.1	931	2.2
Scottish Provident	1,370	2.1	1,370	2.1
Scottish Widows	821	1.8	816	1.7
Skandia Life	1,880	1.8	1,880	1.8
Standard Life	746	1.9	746	1.9
Sun Alliance	797	1.8	719	1.8
Sun Life	1,670	1.9	1,650	1.9
Sun Life of Canada	1,450	1.8	1,770	2.7
TSB Life & Pensions	505	1.6	505	1.8

Where charges for unit-linked personal pensions have not been available, those for with-profit products (WP) are used, as indicated. Where different charges are used by comparison, the cheapest figure has been used. Reduction in yield is the average annual fall in the value of a policy after company charges and commission have been paid.

the first time that some companies, particularly those who still collect premiums door-to-door, can only achieve vaguely generous maturity payouts to the handful of policyholders who get that far by penalising the vast majority who halt their contributions early.

The report shows that independent financial advisers

(IFAs) show little or no bias towards companies which pay higher commissions. Most opted for firms paying the same amount of remuneration. Unlike direct salesforces, growing numbers of IFAs are prepared to rebate some of their commission back to their clients.

But their choice of pension providers varied widely, includ-

ing companies where charges in the first five years ranged between £1,000 and £2,000. Charges - and the fact that many of them are levied in the first few years of a policy - can take up to 40 per cent of a fund's value.

Reliance Mutual, one of the companies named in the report, charges an average of 2.8 per cent each year over the 25-year

lifetime of a fund. Assuming contributions of £60 a month and investment growth of 9 per cent, the value of a fund without any charges at all might reach almost £5,500. The effect of Reliance Mutual's charges in the first five years is to take up to £2,020 from the personal pension.

Table compiled by Nabila Zar

Kinnock setback for BA hopes of alliance

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

British Airways' hopes of getting European Commission approval for its proposed alliance with American Airlines were dealt a serious setback yesterday when it emerged that Neil Kinnock, Transport Commissioner, has unexpectedly accepted that the two carriers' plans to sell off some of their lucrative runway slots at Heathrow Airport were illegal.

Mr Kinnock, who supports the principle of airlines buying and selling take-off and landing slots, had previously maintained that EC regulations probably did allow for the practice. However, following further analysis his department has concluded that its original interpretation of the rules was wrong. A source said: "Mr Kinnock's view has changed since December. It now appears that it's not really legal to trade slots."

The shift is likely to strengthen the position of the Competition Commissioner, Karel van Miert, who is also investigating the alliance and has insisted that slot trading is contrary to EC law and should be outlawed completely. The widening rift between the competition and transport commissioners will be referred to a hearing of the full Commission by the end of March. However, the source gave little hope of a compromise.

If the EC decides to outlaw formally slot-trading it could severely weaken British Airways' negotiating position as it attempts to clear regulatory hurdles in the UK, the European Commission and the US.

The Office of Fair Trading has approved the tie-up with American on condition that the alliance gives up 168 slots at Heathrow over a two-year period, a figure equivalent to 12 daily round trips. The alliance would still be left with some 3,000 slots at Heathrow.

However, the OFT has not objected to British Airways' proposal that it should be allowed to sell off the slots, a move which could net the company £180m.

Industry experts have estimated slots at Heathrow, the world's busiest and most sought after airport, could be worth £1.5m each.

Opposition to British Airways' slot-trading plans mounted yesterday as three more US carriers - Continental, USAir and TWA - submitted critical responses to the OFT.

Continental, the world's seventh-largest carrier, launched the most outspoken attack on the alliance yet by a rival airline.

Barry Simon, Continental's head of international affairs, said: "The OFT's report is an intellectual and moral disgrace. It must be the result of political pressure."

Hansen steps out for fresh debut

Patrick Toohar

The ghost of predictions past came back to haunt Alan Hansen yesterday as he branched out into a new field of football punditry.

The Match of the Day analyst and former Liverpool captain has been hired on a three-year contract to act as consultant to Britain's first dedicated football fund to be launched by investment bank Singer & Friedlander next month.

"Alan's in-depth knowledge of the workings of football clubs and contacts in the game will be invaluable to us in getting the best opportunities early," said Tony Fraher, chief executive of S&F Investment Funds.

But during a packed press conference at a football theme bar in central London, Mr Hansen was soon reminded of a remark he made last season about Manchester United's youth policy: "You can't win anything with kids," he famously opined to the watching millions. Unfortunately for Mr Hansen, Manchester United went on to win the League and FA Cup double.

Only time will tell if Mr Hansen's forecasts for the new fund about what is hot

and what is not in the world of football will be as wide of the mark.

Mr Hansen will not be offering the fund investment advice as such. He has taken no regulatory examinations and for him the letters SFA still mean Scottish Football Association rather than the Securities and Futures Authority.

"I'm only here to give my opinion and advice on the prospects of clubs," he insisted yesterday.

What Mr Hansen did provide was a typically sober assessment of who are likely to emerge as the winners in the headlong rush of football clubs to seek listings on the Stock Exchange.

"You are only as good as the 11 players on the pitch. When you go public you have got more money to buy better players. Success breeds success."

The problem, Mr Hansen acknowledged, was that very few quality players were available and expensive imports tended to disappoint. "Some of the continental players haven't the heart for the competition," he continued. "They have to play as hard as the rest on a wet rainy night in January."

Mr Hansen was more san-



From player to pundit: Alan Hansen will forecast for fund

guine about Newcastle United's prospects for a £200m flotation by Enstet, despite this week's shock resignation of Kevin Keegan as manager. "I can't see any problems," he said. "If Kenny Dalgleish [the bookies' favourite to succeed Keegan and a close friend of Hansen's]

took over tomorrow the gloom and doom would be lifted."

The Singer & Friedlander football fund aims for capital growth and will invest up to £200m in individual clubs in Britain and Europe as well as related companies in sportswear, retailing and media. The minimum lump sum investment is £1000 with a regular savings scheme available from £50 a month. An initial charge of 4.5 per cent will be levied, plus an annual management fee of 1.5 per cent.

"We are not going to invest in every club, we are going to be selective," Mr Fraher said. "That's why we signed Alan. He will tell us things we would never know."

S & F expects the fund to have wide appeal among fans and private investors as well as larger institutions seeking exposure to a football sector whose shares have risen by 696 per cent since 1993 - outstripping the stock market as a whole by a factor of ten.

Critics say the fund is being launched when football shares have already secured their most spectacular gains. S & F believes sporting and increased television sponsorship deals, merchandising and increased television income from pay-per-view will secure the fund's future growth.

Investors call for Sears chief executive to quit

Nigel Cole

The troubled Sears retail empire, which spans the Selfridges department store and Freemans mail order businesses, was heading for break-up yesterday after the group delivered the latest in a series of profit warnings.

Institutions were left fuming by a disastrous trading update which said that Sears' pre-tax profits for the full year would be "significantly below" last year's £100m. The group said its Christmas sales had been poor with particularly weak performances from its Freemans and footware businesses.

Institutional investors immediately called for the dismissal of Liam Strong, the group's chief executive. Sears' Christmas trading statement was seen as his last chance to repair City confidence after a five-year tenure characterised by poor trading and false dawns.

One shareholder said: "It's yet another disappointment. Other retailers seem to be able to get their act together when they have the right man at the helm. Five years is convention-

ally considered long enough for a chief executive to put a strategic plan together."

Though Sears chairman Sir Boh Reid said he and the board still supported Mr Strong, the vote of confidence failed to convince the City. One shareholder said: "We would like to meet the chairman to hear exactly why he is so supportive of the management."

Another commented: "The institutions will demand blood and they will probably get it." However, he added that Sears was in such a poor state that it seemed "beyond repair".

Sears is now considered a break-up target with analysts such as Nick Bubb at M&P Securities predicting a property buyer. "I think it goes without saying that Liam Strong will go. The question is whether anyone new will come in before the inevitable bid happens."

Mr Bubb predicts a break-up value of 120p a share. Sears shares closed down 4p to 87.5p. It is likely to announce the sale of the Freemans mail order business to Littlewoods early next week though this last-ditch attempt at releasing share-

holder value will be seen as too little too late. The sale price, thought to be around £375m, will also disappoint analysts.

Yesterday's profits warning came in stark contrast to other retailers which are reporting strong sales increases boosted by rising consumer spending. The group said that like-for-like sales in the second half to 6 January increased by just 1 per cent. Trading in the Christmas period was worse with comparative sales down 0.5 per cent.

Selfridges and the clothing division both did well with 8 per cent sales gains. But like-for-like sales were down 4 per cent at Adams childrenswear, 2.8 per cent in the footwear division and 6.5 per cent at Freemans.

The break-up of the Sears empire would mark the end of the rambling conglomerate built up by the late Sir Charles Clore in the 1950s. At one stage its interests included Galfrid housebuilding as well as motor and engineering interests.

Mr Strong himself has taken the role to a host of familiar high street names such as Olympus Sports and Millets.

Comment, page 23

STOCK MARKETS

Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	4087.00	-0.50	-0.0	4118.50	3632.30	3.81
FTSE 250	4517.70	-14.60	-0.3	4568.00	4015.30	3.47
FTSE 350	2034.10	-1.60	-0.1	2043.00	1816.00	3.74
FTSE SmallCap	2229.15	+2.94	+0.1	2244.36	1954.06	3.02
FTSE All-Share	2008.15	-1.29	-0.1	2013.66	1791.85	3.58
New York	6620.67	+71.19	+1.1	6600.66	5932.94	2.93
Tokyo	18073.87	-605.51	-3.3	22666.90	18073.87	0.841
Hong Kong	13198.11	-256.82	-1.9	13530.95	10204.87	3.091
Frankfurt	2892.63	-13.71	-0.5	2909.91	2253.36	1.581

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES

Short sterling	UK medium gilt	US long bond
3m	7.75	6.50
6m	7.75	6.50
12m	7.75	6.50
24m	7.75	6.50
36m	7.75	6.50
48m	7.75	6.50
60m	7.75	6.50
72m	7.75	6.50
84m	7.75	6.50
96m	7.75	6.50
108m	7.75	6.50
120m	7.75	6.50

Money Market Rates

Index	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year
UK	5.84	7.00	7.64	7.49
US	5.44	5.97	6.53	5.79
Japan	0.44	0.47	2.51	1.71
Germany	3.09	3.06	3.87	6.71

Bond Yields

Index	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	Long Bond	Yield (%)
UK	5.84	7.00	7.64	7.49	7.74	7.64
US	5.44	5.97	6.53	5.79	6.17	6.17
Japan	0.44	0.47	2.51	1.71	4.4	4.4
Germany	3.09	3.06	3.87	6.71	8.74	6.72

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Index	Price	Change	Yield (%)
Brit. Borneo Pils 1010.5	72.5	7.7	7.7
Premier Oil	39.3	2.5	6.8
Calvin Energy	468.5	25	5.6
Sears	87.5	4	4.4
Premier Parcel	700.5	31.5	4.3
Flamingo Jap Inv	182	7	3.7

CURRENCIES

£/\$

£/DM

£/¥

Pound

Yesterday	Change	Year Ago
\$ (London)	1.9808	-2.05c 1.5447
DM (West)	1.7128	+2.15c 1.5440
DM (London)	2.6068	-3.05c 2.2197
¥ (London)	195.611	-33.02 181.553
£ Index	95.0	-1.1 83.0

Dollar

Yesterday	Change	Year Ago
£ (London)	0.5914	-0.02 0.8474
£ (DM West)	0.5899	-0.75 0.6772
DM (London)	1.5418	+0.07c 1.4370
¥ (London)	115.695	-30.375 104.585
£ Index	98.5	-0.3 94.5

OTHER INDICATORS

Yesterday	Change	Year Ago	Index	Lastest	Tr Ago	Next Page	
Oil Brent \$	24.77	+0.38	17.89	RPI	153.94	+2.7pc 149.6	16 Jan
Gold \$	355.70	+0.55	398.45	GDP	109.8	+2.3pc 105.7	27 Jan
Gold £	209.95	-0.41	257.85	Base Rates	-6.00pc	6.75	—

Take politics out of merger decisions altogether



COMMENT

'Present legislation places the Secretary of State in a quasi-judicial position when deciding whether or not to allow takeovers to proceed. That is always a dangerous place to leave an ambitious politician'

A lot of people have had good cause to rue Alan Lang's capricious approach to mergers policy over the last year. But George Simpson, now managing director of GEC, is not one of them. When GEC bid for the warship builder, VSEL, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission decided it should be sent packing on the not unreasonable grounds that Britain only had three such yards and GEC already owned one of them.

Fortunately for GEC, Michael "National Champions" Heseltine, was in charge then at the Department of Trade and Industry and he duly brushed the MMC's recommendations aside. Would GEC have fared differently had Mr Lang then been in the hot seat?

In short, it is impossible to say. Mr Lang has executed so many U-turns since he arrived that if he isn't dizzy and thoroughly confused, then the rest of the business community certainly is.

In his last pronouncement on the subject, the President of the Board of Trade made it crystal clear that mergers which increased market domination or created national champions were not on. Since then he has blocked the Bass/Carlsberg Tetley deal but approved British Airways alliance with American Airlines. How's that for consistency?

Step forward Mr Simpson to inject some clarity. In his other incarnation as a member of the cumbersome titled Commission on Public Policy and British Business, Mr Simpson has the chance to strike a blow for all those not as fortunate as GEC.

A report due out from the commission next week will conclude that the Government's competition policy is in a mess. That much we knew. It hardly takes a committee of the great and the good to point out that this administration's track record has been contradictory, weak and riven by short-term political considerations.

Would Labour perform any better? Probably not. The old style corporatism that would creep back in would almost certainly put paid to a rational or consistent competition and mergers policy.

The core of the problem, as the commission's report highlights, is that present legislation places the Secretary of State in a quasi-judicial position when deciding whether or not to allow takeovers to proceed, and on many other matters concerning competition policy. That is always a dangerous place to leave an ambitious politician.

The solution proposed by the commission is to allow ministers to continue making the final decision but then require them to set out their detailed reasoning in public, thus making the whole process transparent. This doesn't go far enough.

While there is something to be said for making sure the buck ultimately stops with elected politicians, there is a stronger case for removing temptation from the grasp of departmental ministers altogether and allowing the courts or some kind of independent cartel office to act as final arbiter. As things stand, competition policy is too

often determined by political whim or favour. Removing these powers from the politicians would go a long way towards depoliticising the process, making pro-competition policy a generally accepted thing across the political divide, as it is in the US.

Break-up of Sears must be on the way

It is just as well that Liam Strong, chief executive of Sears, is a lover of military history. His hero is General Ulysses S Grant, whose motto was: "Find your enemy, then move in on him and hit him hard and keep on hitting him." Sadly for Mr Strong, the City has identified him as the enemy at Sears and has been hitting him hard for some time. He now appears fatally wounded.

The polished, almost impish Ulsterman is unlikely to go quietly, however. He is fighting for his business reputation. When he jetted in to Sears from British Airways five years ago, Mr Strong was thought capable of great things. But indecisiveness and caution appear to have got the better of him. Formats and management have been chopped and changed. And the radical pruning of the Sears portfolio was delayed until it was too late.

Sears has proved a woeful investment in the Strong years. Insults were giving him one last chance to prove that Sears could trade its way out of difficulties. He has

bogged it and it now appears certain that he will be offered up for sacrifice. To be fair, there is an argument that Sears was always such a mess that was beyond the wit of even the brightest manager. Unfortunately that will not help Mr Strong now. The City is in no mood for excuses.

And wither Sears in all this? As an empire it is crumbling and a break-up is surely not far away. Lord Wolfson, the new chairman of Great Universal Stores and Next, has a theory that most of the strongest retailers are single brand entities. There was never any worthwhile link between most of the disparate Sears formats. Now the name looks set to be consigned to the dustbin of British retail history. It will not be mourned.

No life insurance revolution yet

The theory behind the move to fuller disclosure of life insurance charges, which began in 1995, was that it would focus the minds of customers on the best value products. As the business then flowed to the better companies, the rest of the industry would have to slash its costs and reduce its charges to remain competitive.

But so far it has not happened, at least judging by this year's statistics from the Personal Investment Authority, which show only a very small overall reduction in charges, and a slight increase among the companies

which were already at the low end of the scale. So soon after the start of the disclosure regime it would perhaps be surprising if the market had been radically transformed. These things take time.

New information must be absorbed and understood. Just as important, the present framework for disclosure allows loopholes which will have to be tackled before customers can rely on the figures. Companies can easily distort the figures by, for example, arranging charging structures so that there is a good return for policies held to maturity but spectacular levels of charging in the first few years. The effect is to slash returns for those who quit early. There is plenty of room for tightening up in this area.

However, let us not be churlish about it. There is evidence that the pressure of disclosure is forcing change on the industry. Look at the decision by Eagle Star this week to offer a policy with a full refund of charges to those who quit in the first two years.

However, it will take a long time to counteract the damage done by the personal pensions mis-selling scandal and the continuing high level of charges which have discredited private sector pension providers in many eyes - most significantly, those of the Labour Party. The party's proposed high-charge personal pensions by setting up large pooled funds. Having been dragged kicking and screaming into cutting its charges, the insurance industry may find it has left it too late.

Jobless at new high in struggling Germany

Imre Karacs

Bonn

Unemployment in Germany hit another post-war high in December, amid signs that the economy is again grinding to a halt after a modest recovery in the second half of last year.

According to figures released by the Federal Labour Office yesterday, unemployment rose by 48,000 last month to a seasonally-adjusted 4.156 million - equal to 10.8 per cent of the workforce. And next month the number of jobless is projected by economists to reach 4.5 million.

Much of the rise is attributed to a down-turn in the construction industry, exacerbated by the extremely cold weather that has been gripping Germany for the past fortnight. Economists have warned that the big freeze could push the overall German growth rate in the first quarter into negative figures, repeating last year's trend.

Even without the weather, the economy is faltering. Provisional figures released yesterday by the National Statistics Office showed last year's growth rate at 1.4 per cent, marginally below forecasts and much lower than the previous year's performance. The office estimates Germany's budget deficit for 1996 was around 3.9 per cent - well above the Maastricht target for European monetary union.

Whether the government can keep its budget deficit within 3 per cent in EMU's qualifying year will depend on the growth rate, which it predicts will be 2.5 per cent this year. That forecast is already off target, however, as it did not anticipate the current slow-down. A larger-than-expected unemployment rate will also place a heavy burden on expenditure, straining the budget beyond the permitted limits.

Earlier this week, the Berlin-based DIW Institute predicted that this year's growth would be around 2 per cent, half a percentage point less than what the government is counting on. And even the joint report of the six leading institutes, which expect the growth rate to be within the government's range, has calculated the budget deficit will still be over 3 per cent.

To qualify for EMU, Chancellor Helmut Kohl must again introduce savage spending cuts, which in turn will further depress domestic consumption. This, however, would make him vulnerable to the charge from political opponents that he was abandoning the jobless to attain a lofty goal that is not shared by his electorate.

Responding to the stream of abysmal figures, Mr Kohl pledged again to strive for jobs, though he had nothing new to offer in the way of a remedy. "Fighting unemployment remains the most important domestic policy challenge," he said. "Current levels of over 4.1 million jobless are completely unacceptable."

The Chancellor said he did not believe that rising unemployment would jeopardise economic recovery this year. "I think the chances for recovery rest on a solid basis," he declared. "I see no reason to adopt a resigned attitude - creating jobs is possible."

Mr Kohl reiterated his government's commitment to overhaul the country's convoluted tax system, details of which are to be announced this month. There is also a pension reform on the way, and cuts in the "solidarity surcharge" - a tax earmarked for eastern Germany. The Chancellor is meanwhile promising another round of talks with unions and employers, which last year produced a pledge to halve unemployment by the year 2000.



Kenneth Clarke (left) meeting his Japanese counterpart, the Finance Minister Hiroshi Mitsuoka, in Tokyo yesterday. During the Chancellor's three-day visit they will be discussing the state of their respective national economies

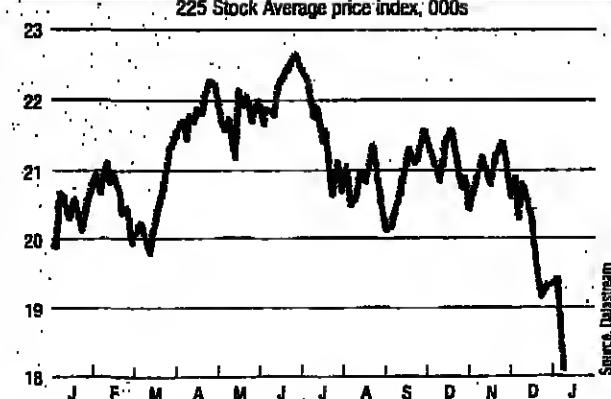
Tokyo's new year sell-off gathers pace

Tom Stevenson

City Editor

Nikkei slumps again

225 Stock Average price index, 000s



The new year sell-off in Tokyo accelerated yesterday as Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 index fell more than 600 points, its third sharp fall in a row and the heaviest one-day decline since April 1995. In the four trading sessions so far this year, the Nikkei has slumped almost 1,300 points to its lowest level for 14 months as investors have panicked, fearing that bad debts and low growth will continue to hobble Japan's financial institutions and economy.

The collapse in Japanese shares coincided with a visit to the country by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kenneth Clarke, who contributed to the debate on the future of Japan's markets by calling for more rapid deregulation of the heavily controlled financial system. He also advised Japan's Finance Minister,

Hiroshi Mitsuoka, to use privatisation to reduce the government deficit. The Japanese government, which faces a 7.4 per cent annual fiscal deficit, is aiming to reduce the deficit to 3 per cent or less by 2005.

Mr Clarke is understood to have said the government should move more quickly than a projected five-year deregulation programme. Mr Mitsuoka responded that the government intends to implement deregulation sooner if possible, and reminded him that the non-life insurance market will be completely deregulated by July 1998.

Japan's stock market has been the biggest loser among the world's bourses so far this year with all its main indexes having lost more than 5 per cent of their value. At Thursday's close of 18,073.87, the Nikkei remains firmly locked in the depressed trading range it has been stuck in since 1992 when the market finally bottomed out after a 50 per cent plunge from its 1990 high of almost 40,000.

For almost five years the Nikkei has threatened to break out of the 15,000 to 20,000 trading range but recurrent worries that the government is unable to stop the decline in land prices or clean up the bad debt hangover from the late 1980s bubble economy have so far kept equities in check.

Yesterday Mr Mitsuoka said the government had no plans to boost the Tokyo stock market, causing Japanese investors to fret about a repeat of 1995's fall in the Nikkei to less than 15,000.

Asahi Mutual Life Insurance's Koichi Kurata said: "The market is going to continue to decline unless the government does something. The biggest problem continues to be bad debt. Investors were pretending the problem had gone away."

Japan's tumbling stock market was viewed piteously by European markets yesterday, with the plummeting Nikkei index providing little more than a long-distance spectator sport for traders here.

Although Japan is the world's second-biggest economy, few European companies have a meaningful exposure there. Fears of slowing growth have little bearing on European businesses.

Those most likely to put their homes on the market lived in London and the South-east, where prices rose last year.

There was an increase of two-thirds in public confidence that house prices would rise over the next 12 months, said the bank. In London and the South-east 69 per cent believed the value of their homes would increase over the period.

The Barclays survey coincided with evidence of a sharp rise in housing starts, with a 15 per cent increase in the three months to November compared with the previous three months.

Economists at Schroders, the merchant bank, forecast house price inflation this year of 10 per cent, followed by 8 per cent next year, and said house price gains would exceed mortgage rates for the first time in seven years. Building societies have suggested 7 to 8 per cent growth in house prices.

Multi-billion bid war for Hughes Electronics

David Osborne

New York

A multi-billion dollar bidding war has broken out in the US for the defence electronics business of Hughes Electronics, which has been put on the block by its parent, General Motors. The outcome could determine the final contours of the US defence industry after four years of consolidation.

Head-to-head in the battle for Hughes is Raytheon, which earlier this week disclosed that it was acquiring the defence electronics units of Texas Instruments, and Northrop Grumman. Winning the race could be critical to each company's hopes of long-term survival as an independent force in the industry.

Raytheon was reported yesterday to have offered \$9bn (£5.3bn) for the Hughes businesses. Northrop Grumman,

however, was believed to have submitted a bid that is higher by perhaps \$200m-\$300m.

Jack Smith, chairman of GM, refused yesterday to comment on the reports as "speculation". "We're just going to have to let that play out," Mr Smith said at a car show in Detroit.

GM has for some months been seeking a way to refocus its businesses on car making. While anxious to divest itself of the defence-related elements of Hughes, it is likely to retain the automotive-electronic parts of the company and perhaps fold them into GM's own Delphi Automotive Systems.

For sentimentalists, the break-up of Hughes will mean the disappearance of a name that is still associated with the legendary eccentric Howard Hughes, who founded the once-mighty Hughes empire in a disused aircraft hangar in south-

ern California during the Second World War.

Raytheon and Northrop Grumman believe that the Hughes businesses, which includes missile systems, radar systems and other products, would make a good fit with their own companies. A bidding war would be dangerous for each, however, since neither can pay more than they can afford.

Buying Hughes would probably involve either of the suitors taking on between \$3bn and \$5bn in new debt. Raytheon is already taking on \$3bn in additional debt in its acquisition of Texas Instruments.

Whoever emerges as the winner, the Hughes deal may prove to be last of any serious scale in the consolidation fever that has gripped America's defence industry. It follows the other mega-merger of last year: Boeing's \$19bn purchase of McDonnell Douglas.

General Motors and VW near settlement

Imre Karacs

Bonn

Volkswagen and General Motors, the two car makers which have been at war for three years, are on the verge of settling their dispute out of court.

Representatives of the two companies were holding secret talks last night in an attempt to reach a formula that would placate GM, whose executive Jose Ignacio Lopez is alleged to have taken secret documents to VW when he was poached by the German company in 1993. Mr Lopez resigned from VW last month, just before he was indicted by a German court for industrial espionage.

GM continued to insist, however, on compensation running into billions of dollars, and an apology from the VW board, which never admitted that it had benefited from Mr Lopez's stolen files. There was no word last night of the compensation

involved, but progress was being made on the wording of VW's grovelling apology.

"I would not comment on ongoing settlement negotiations," VW spokesman Klaus Kocks said. "We do very much appreciate the moderate and fair wording of my colleagues on the [GM] side," he added.

GM confirmed that representatives of the two companies had been holding talks in the US over the past few days. An announcement is expected today. General Motors claims Mr Lopez, its former purchasing chief, took confidential files with him when he defected to VW in 1993. GM and its Opel subsidiary have filed a lawsuit against Volkswagen in Detroit, while VW issued a counter-suit for libel.

German prosecutors last month indicted Mr Lopez and three other former GM managers who went with him to VW on charges of stealing GM secrets.

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THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

The progress of Goode Durrant just goes to show that not all stock market turnarounds are overnight successes. Michael Waring heaved away for years after buying in and taking the reins in 1983 with little apparent benefit to shareholders. But, as the chart shows, things have been coming right in spades over the past three years for what is now a pure vehicle hire and equipment rental group.

The business has been a stellar performer as the UK pulled out of recession and the latest half-year figures to October are no exception, with pre-tax profits rising 13 per cent to £15.2m. But Goode's management deserves full credit for the performance of its Northgate vehicle hire operations, which represented 95 per cent of operating profits in the period and is the UK market leader in light commercial vehicle rental. The latest figures came despite a 2 per cent fall in hire rates as rivals scrambled for volume at the expense of margins.

The market is already showing signs of steadying and the decision to concentrate on this sector of the market has proved well made over the long term. The business has grown consistently, while Goode claims never to have made a loss when selling on its vehicles after their typical two-and-a-half year life with the group. Its success is a strong argument for its four-year depreciation policy, even if purists might suggest it would be more appropriate to write the van fleet down over its 30-month average life with the group.

But the lotem around which Mr Waring runs his business is utilisation rates, which have hardly wavered from 91 per cent since 1992. He argues that if fleet usage falls below that level, it is time to sell and, given the resale values, he has no problem getting rid of the excess. Thus far, the fleet has grown steadily, as the successful formula of flexible rental, formalised under the Northgate brand name last autumn, has continued to win customers.

Recent wins, including Rolls-Royce, Coca-Cola and Ever Ready, add to a lengthening list of blue-chip clients and the long-term outlook looks excellent. Northgate's 7 per cent share of a total hire fleet which is just 7.5 per cent of the total number of vans on the road suggests bags of scope for overall market growth and the group's share within it.

The potential is illustrated by the fact that some 28 per cent of the more developed US van fleet is supplied through rented or leased vehicles. Goode must live on its wits to retain its customer base, given the lack of any contractual relationship. More serious doubts could be hung around the discounts received from Ford for buying so many of its vehicles every year. That will account for over half group profits this year, but shows no sign of be-

British Borneo wealth warning

British Borneo's shares have gushed in the past year, rising three-fold on the back of a rising oil price, a steady flow of good exploration news and most recently buoyed by the takeover speculation that has frothed around the sector since Gulf Canada made a £430m bid at Clyde Petroleum.

Yesterday's news that its Morpeth field in the Gulf of Mexico probably holds 50 per cent more oil than previously expected sent the shares sharply higher again.

Trading at less than 800p a week ago, the shares broke through £10 yesterday to close at 1,010.5p, a record high for the stock.

Early expectations for Morpeth had put reserves at about 50 million barrels of oil equivalent. Yesterday Borneo said it expected the field to yield 77 million barrels and said that under optimum conditions it could produce as much as 92 million.

The Morpeth announcement was the latest in a string of positive moves by the explorer that has seen it exploit close links with BP and Shell in the Mexican Gulf, widely viewed as one of the world's most exciting exploration areas.

Earlier this week, the company said it was buying a 40 per cent stake in a BP field and last month it bought rights to drill three tracts held by Shell.

It is quite some transformation for a business that eight years ago was nothing more than an oil sector investment trust.

In the interim, under the guidance of youthful chief executive Alan Gaynor, British Borneo has built up an enviable portfolio of exploration and production assets and it is little surprise that it has been widely tipped as a takeover candidate.

Anyone who has missed the party so far, however, should tread very carefully and cast their memories back to the early 1980s when the sector last had its moment in the sun. Ten years ago the oil sector shared many characteristics with today's volatile biotech stocks.

The problem for any investor in oil explorers is that valuing the companies is little more than a finger-in-the-air exercise. It involves assumptions about the oil price, the size of reserves, exchange rates and, most importantly, the interest rates used to discount back

future cash flows. Small changes in one or several of those can cause giant swings in value both up and down.

Some analysts believe Borneo shares could be worth up to £12. Others, especially those who think a takeover at this level unlikely, are recommending profit-taking and a switch into a more likely bid target such as Cairn Energy. After such a strong run, caution should be the watchword.

Reg Vardy motors on

In an industry still stuck with an Arthur Daley image, Reg Vardy stands out. The Sunderland-based car dealer was one of the first to spot the potential of nearly-new vehicles when the bottom fell out of the new car market in 1989 - the year Vardy joined the stock market at 90p.

Since then the shares have bounded ahead, partly on the back of Vardy's nous for spotting trends early. The latest shift is for manufacturers to favour a geographical market approach rather than granting one-off dealerships - leaving distribution of their cars to dealers responsible for their own patch.

This requires a significant level of capital expenditure by distributors so Vardy, along with several other motor dealers, was not slow to come cap in hand to investors last year, raising £2.7m via a one-for-five rights issue at 300p.

The shares drifted south following the cash call, partly due to poor autumn sales, but yesterday's better than expected results helped restore confidence in the shares, which closed 23p higher at 315.5p. Shares in Pendragon, another well regarded motor dealer, jumped in sympathy.

Vardy's pre-tax profits before one-off items rose by 28 per cent to £7.86m on sales 23 per cent ahead at £344.6m thanks to strong organic growth in both vehicle sales and after-sales operations. Just under two-thirds of the 36,572 (30,125) units shifted were used vehicles, where the underlying increase in gross profits was an impressive 36 per cent.

Vardy used the rights issue money to cut gearing to 11 per cent and to increase the number of car dealerships to 43, with a target of 60 within a couple of years. Recent franchises awarded include Fiat in Birmingham and Honda in Newcastle.

Despite rising interest rates and the buying hiatus a general election is likely to cause, prospects remain good. Broker Granville Davies sticks with its full-year pre-tax forecast of £17.3m rising to £18.8 in 1998, implying a price/earnings ratio of 14 falling to less than 13. Solid value.

ITV gets set for £88m payout by Channel 4

Mathew Horsman
Media Editor

Channel 4, the public service broadcaster, will write a cheque for £88m payable to the ITV companies in three weeks' time, with Michael Green's Carlton Communications, the leading Channel 3 broadcaster, set to receive about £38m.

The payments are due under the controversial Channel 4 funding formula, which obliges the fourth channel to pay any excess it earns from advertising revenues over and above 14 per cent of total qualifying revenue in the terrestrial television sector. Last year, £74m was paid out by Channel 4.

Carlton's share, which relates to its Central and London weekday franchises, represents just under 10 per cent of estimated 1997 pre-tax profits, according to media analysts.

Lesser amounts are due to other ITV companies, depending in part on their share of national advertising revenues. HTV, for example, is in line to receive £6.4m.

The Independent Television Commission, which adjudicates the payment, declined to comment last night. An announcement is expected within a few weeks. Channel 4 also declined to comment, saying it would await a formal announcement from the ITC.

The system was put in place to ensure that ITV companies were compensated for guaranteeing the viability of Channel 4 when the service was launched in 1982. Michael Grade, the chief executive of Channel 4, has led a vociferous campaign to abolish the funding formula, which he says reduces the channel's flexibility in planning for future programming.

The system is expected to be reformed in 1998, with payments reduced to zero. ITV companies have argued strenuously against the reforms.

Channel 4 insiders said last night the payments were "iniquitous" and again called on the Government to make a formal pledge to reduce the payments by 1998.

Critics of Channel 4 say the

payments are necessary to ensure that the channel maintains its commitment to "alternative" programming. The commercial success of the channel has been helped by hit series imported from the US, which in turn have allowed it to bid even more for programmes. This year, the programme budget is set to rise by 17 per cent to £320m, roughly a par with BBC2.

Channel 5's chief executive, David Elstein, long a critic of Channel 4, said last night that the fourth channel should have its remit changed to ensure that it provided an alternative programming service to both ITV and the new Channel 5 service.

The phasing out of the funding formula is expected to coincide with a rebalancing of cash payments made by ITV companies to the Treasury, as part of their licence requirements. Companies which made high bids under the 1990 Broadcasting Act will be permitted to renegotiate the payments with the ITC.



Channelling cash: Michael Grade has led a vociferous campaign to abolish the funding which he says reduces programming flexibility

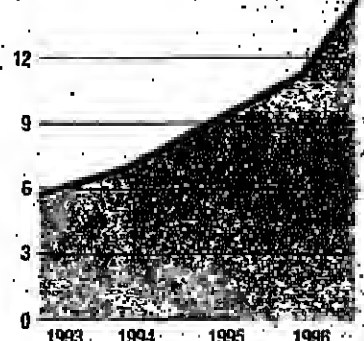
Goode Durrant: at a glance

Market value: £226m, share price 416.5p

Trading record	1994	1995	1996	1995	1996
Turnover (£m)	101	123	105	95	100
Pre-tax profits (£m)	10.6	14.2	21.3	13.4	16.2
Earnings per share (pence)	14.8	17.8	26.4	16.2	18.8
Dividends per share (pence)	6.0	7.2	8.6	2.6	3.2

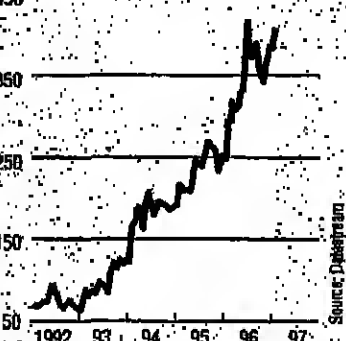
Vehicle fleet

thousands



Share price

pence



IN BRIEF

• US producer prices rose 0.5 per cent in December, more than twice as fast as market expectations and up from an 0.4 per cent increase the previous month. The official government figures showed that for the whole of 1996, producer prices were up 2.8 per cent, an acceleration from the 2.3 per cent rise recorded in 1995. The core rate, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, nudged ahead by 0.1 per cent in December against a consensus figure of 0.2 per cent. Separately, the Labor Department revealed that initial claims for regular state unemployment benefits fell 13,000 to 361,000 for the week ended 4 January.

• A consortium led by British Nuclear Fuels, the nuclear waste reprocessor, yesterday won a £650m contract from the US to clean up a former weapons research and design site in Idaho. The 20-year contract takes the value of BNFL's reprocessing business in the US to \$2.6bn (£1.5bn). BNFL, which operates the Sellafield site in Cumbria, is being partnered by five other companies.

• The electricity watchdog, Offer, has attacked power suppliers for offering what it believes are long-term contracts to small business customers which could lock them into supply arrangements during and after the introduction of full competition from April 1998. Five regional electricity companies are thought to be offering the deals, which provide discounts for customers if they sign up for five years or more. Northern Electric is cutting 10 per cent off its normal gas and electricity prices in a six-year contract, though a spokesman insisted the arrangement could be terminated early. Offer said it was concerned the arrangements could lock customers into supply contracts when better deals were available after 1998.

• David Sokol, head of CE Electric, has appointed eight new board members at Northern Electric, following the US group's narrow victory in the £782m hostile takeover battle before Christmas. Six of the eight are from CalEnergy, CE Electric's majority shareholder, while the other two are from Peter Kiewit, the US construction company which backed the takeover bid. Two non-executive directors of Northern resigned yesterday. Remaining members of the old-guard, including Northern's chairman, David Morris, and chief executive, Tony Hadfield, are expected to resign from the company in the next few days. Contractual pay-offs are expected to total some £2m.

• Core Laboratories, a US provider of analytical services to the oil industry, is to make a 53p-a-share cash offer for Scott Pickford. Core said the board of Scott Pickford had indicated it intended to recommend the offer, which values the entire existing issued share capital of Scott Pickford at about £6.7m. Core is capitalised at around \$185m (£111m) on the US Nasdaq National Market.

• McKechie's chief executive, Michael Ost, is to resign after almost 10 years with the plastics and components group. He is to be succeeded by Andrew Walker, who was chief executive of South Wales Electricity before it was taken over by Welsh Water to form Hyder. The handover takes place on 10 March.

• Boots Healthcare International, the pharmaceuticals arm of the chemists group of the same name, has acquired the privately owned Italian skincare specialist Farmila Dermal and certain other assets for £4.1m. The acquisition was part of Boots' strategy of taking its skincare brands worldwide, the group said.

Company Results

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Abbey (P)	(R28.8m) (R22.4m)	(R3.6m) (R3m)	6.10p (5.19p)	2.2p (+)
Direct Holdings (P)	25.8m (22.7m)	4.38m (4.4m)	4.18p (4.31p)	0.54p (0.5p)
Goode Durrant (P)	70.2m (55m)	15.2m (13.4m)	18.5p (16.3p)	3.2p (2.8p)
Jerry Hotel Group (P)	(R29.3m) (R25m)	(R7.9m) (R5.7m)	14.5p (12p)	2.5p (+)
PART (P)	- (+)	8m (7.8m)	4.55p (4.47p)	2.5p (2.25p)
RCD Holdings (P)	48.2m (49.1m)	1.3m (2.9m)	8.58p (18.03p)	16p (16p)
Reg Vardy (P)	344.6m (278.8m)	8.2m (6.2m)	10.7p (8.9p)	2.8p (2.25p)

(P) - Profit (L) - Loss (M) - More months

Kleinwort fined £30,000 by SFA

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Kleinwort Benson Securities has been reprimanded, fined £30,000 and ordered to pay £7,900 in costs to the Securities and Futures Authority (SFA), the City regulator, after admitting to failures in its internal controls.

Alastair Truelove and Philip Steel, two former registered representatives of the firm, were disciplined for misrepresenting positions which resulted in Kleinwort showing a paper loss of approximately £500,000.

And, in two unconnected cases, one current employee and one former employee of Merrill Lynch International Bank, the private banking operation of the US bank, have been fined and reprimanded by the SFA.

In Kleinwort's case, Mr Truelove, a manager and trader in European convertible notes, was reprimanded, fined £7,500 and required to pay £3,000 towards the SFA's costs.

Mr Steel, who worked as Mr Truelove's assistant, was reprimanded and required to pay £2,000 towards costs. He was not fined because the SFA said it had taken into account that at the time he was only in his

mid-20s, had been working in the back office at Kleinwort and had no experience in trading convertible notes and warrants.

The SFA said Mr Truelove and Mr Steel adopted a practice of marking positions on the European convertible notes and warrants book which was neither in accordance with the SFA's rules nor with Kleinwort's own mark to market policy between 1 July 1995 and the beginning of September 1995.

The consequent mispricing of positions concealed a substantial, though unrealised, loss on Kleinwort's profit and loss account, the regulator said.

A spokesman for Kleinwort Benson said the firm had spotted the problem and reported it to the SFA.

In the actions taken against the Merrill Lynch staff, the SFA said Melville Ipe, who is still a registered representative of the bank, was fined £7,500, reprimanded and required to pay £7,500 towards the SFA's costs for selling a product to a customer which was unsuitable.

Tanvier Malik, a former registered representative, was fined £15,000 and required to pay £5,000 towards costs after providing incomplete valuation reports to a private customer.

Tobacco shares hit by US lawsuit move

David Osborne
New York

Share prices in BAT and recently floated Imperial Tobacco suffered setbacks in London trading following reports in America that the Liggett Group is preparing to co-operate further with states that have filed lawsuits against the industry.

Word of the Liggett move was especially discouraging for BAT, whose Brown & Williamson subsidiary in the US is in the front lines of the industry's legal and political troubles. Shares of BAT dropped yesterday by 13p to 472.5p, while Imperial's price fell 7p to 377p.

Lawyers for Liggett, which is headed by Bennett LeBow, are said to be ready to assist 11

states in lawsuits filed against the industry aimed at recovering state funds spent on treating smoking-related diseases. Last year, Liggett settled with five other states that had started legal proceedings.

It is a chilling prospect for the other tobacco companies. Most intriguingly, Liggett is believed to be ready to surrender handwritten notes taken by its own lawyers over three decades of closed-door meetings at which all the tobacco companies allegedly set strategy to avoid prosecution. "This is the plum," one tobacco source said.

R J Reynolds was dismissive of the Liggett manoeuvre, which it termed a "PR play" and a case of "another illusory settlement in the making".

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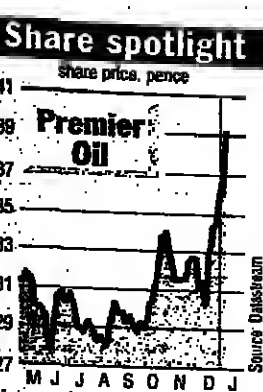
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market report / shares

Taking Stock

Praise pushes Barclays and NatWest to new highs

Data Bank	
FTSE 100	4087.0 -0.5
FTSE 250	4517.7 -14.6
FTSE 350	2034.1 -1.6
SEAQ VOLUME	758.8m shares, 38,131 bargains
Gifts Index	93.31 -0.20



An upbeat performance by Barclays and National Westminster Bank helped the stock market recover from an indifferent opening. The banking display was prompted by thoughts of share buy-backs and cheerful comments with next month's figures.

Salomon Brothers, the US securities house, is keen on both shares and believes the two banks will indulge in huge chip sales with a 28.5p gain to a 1.065.5p peak and NatWest, almost showered with analytical praise lately, rose 15.5p to 741p, also a new high.

Salomon believes Barclays should produce profits around £2.3bn (£2bn) but feels increased provisions and higher technology costs could cut NatWest profits to £1.1bn although progress will resume this year.

The banking excitement swamped vague talk Barclays

could bid for Norwich Union, one of the mutual societies planning to convert into a plc this year. In early trading the shares were down 12p before the buy-back story captured the market's imagination.

Cable & Wireless was another in the spotlight. As Hong Kong's last days as a colony melt away, the position of Cable's 58 per cent interest in Hong Kong Telecom has to be resolved.

Most believe Cable's new chief executive, Dick Brown, is near to completing a deal which will sharply reduce the HKT stake and allow Cable to play a major part in the development of the Chinese communications industry. The shares rose 7.5p to 482.5p.

In early trade Footsie was down 37 points. Then a rally set in and when New York displayed renewed confidence blue chips almost managed to eliminate their falls. With



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

sie ending just 0.5 points lower at 4,087.

Oils were firm with much of the action down among the second liners. British Petroleum rose 25p to 1,010.5p, reflecting takeover hopes and much higher estimates of the reserves of one of its Gulf of Mexico fields. Cairn Energy, on Bangladesh development hopes as well as bid talk, added 25p to 482.5p. Premier Oil was also pulled into the speculative cauldron, gaining 2.5p to 39.25p. Ariva Petroleum, following a confident report on its Colombian operations, rose 8p to 41.5p.

Bui Burmah Castrol was

one to miss the fun. A profits downgrading by HSBC James Capel lowered the price 22.5p to 1,086.5p. Capel cut last year's expectation from £168m to £145m and next from £172m to £150m.

Shares, which duly produced a dismal trading statement, lost 4p to 87.5p.

Profit warnings hit computer group Staffware, off 56p to 197.5p, and metal basher Rabenold, 55p to 112.5p.

Zeneca, after early falls, ended 6.5p higher at 1,637.5p. Estimates about the damage the strong pound is doing seem to have been overdone. It now appears a 6 per cent downgrade is nearer the mark rather

than the 11 per cent suggested on Wednesday.

Imperial Chemical Industries fell 14p to 751p as Capel lowered its profit forecasts by £100m to £650m and by the same amount to £500m. Other chemical shares felt the strain.

Ladbroke shed 2p to 230p with ABN Amro Hoare Govett moving its stance from buy to hold. Bannockburn Countywide put on 7p to 111p as SBC Warburg backed on the shares on the back of the recovery in the residential property market.

Publishers were in demand, reflecting a sharp fall in newspaper prices. Daily Mail and General Trust gained 57.5p to 1,535p and Mirror Group 4p to 226.5p. Reuters remained weak on competition worries, off 13p to 706.5p.

Matthew Clark rose 18.6p to 277.5p as bid hopes were revived; figures are due next

week. Courtaulds Textiles, a trading statement expected today, firmed to 227.5p.

GB Railways, the most popular share among Sharelink clients in the past week, eased 5p to 247.5p.

Fenchurch, the insurance broker, rose 6p to 58p on bid hopes; shares were 15.5p a year ago. Lamont, a textile group where vague takeover hopes stirred recently, fell 10p to 184p as a market maker appeared to sell 320,000 shares at 175p.

Superframe, making photographic frames and shelving units, gained 2p to 18p. Dean Corporation, a building and property group, has taken control of a 25.8 per cent stake at 20p.

Quadrant, making coin handling equipment, held at 247.5p. Garland Whitley and Barker, a corporate developer, placed 4.5 million shares through Charterhouse Tilney with institutions at 246p.

Chlefax & Fowler should be a beneficiary of the revival in the residential housing market. The npmarket fabric and furnishing group seems destined for a trading uplift. Around £2.2m is expected this year. At 115p the shares have been overlooked.

Emerald Energy's Colombian adventure was given a boost when Seven Seas Petroleum, a Canadian group, announced a "proliferate" find 20 miles from where Emerald, unchanged at 4.25p, is due to explore. The Seven Seas field, which may contain more than one billion barrels of oil, was discovered and largely developed by Keith Hewitt, who is leading the Emerald search.

Japanese investment trusts are suffering in the wake of the Tokyo share slide. Fleming Japan fell 7p to 182p; it was 289p in May.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The year's last year's dividend, grossed up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items.

Other details: Ex-Gratia is Ex-Gratia; E is all UK Unlisted Securities Market's Suspended; P is Parity Paid on 1st Jan; S is All Stock.

Source: FT Information

The Independent Index

The index allows you to access real-time share prices by phone from London Stock Exchange. Simply dial 0800 123 333 and when prompted to do so, enter the 4-digit code printed next to each share. To access the latest financial reports call 0800 123 333 followed by one of the two-digit codes below.

Anyone with a tone-dial telephone can use this service. For a detailed description of the Independent Index, including its portfolio facility, phone 0800 123 333.

For assistance, call our helpline 071 874 4788 (9am-5pm).

Call charges: 5p per minute (daytime), and 45p at other times. Call charges include VAT.

Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol
Barclays	12,000,000	Shell	10,000,000	NatWest	9,000,000	HSBC	8,000,000
Bank of Scotland	8,000,000	First Group	7,000,000	British Petroleum	6,000,000	Ariva	5,000,000
BT	4,000,000	British Airways	3,000,000	Virgin Atlantic	2,000,000	British Airways	1,000,000
British Airways	1,000,000	Virgin Atlantic	500,000	British Airways	500,000	Virgin Atlantic	500,000

FTSE 100 index hour by hour

Time	Index	Time	Index	Time	Index	Time	Index
09:00	4087.0	10:00	4087.0	11:00	4087.0	12:00	4087.0
13:00	4087.0	14:00	4087.0	15:00	4087.0	16:00	4087.0

High/Low

Stock	High	Low	Stock	High	Low	Stock	High	Low
Barclays	4087.0	4087.0	Shell	1000.0	1000.0	NatWest	741.0	741.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	800.0	First Group	700.0	700.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	1010.5
BT	400.0	400.0	British Airways	300.0	300.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	200.0

Low/High

Stock	Low	High	Stock	Low	High	Stock	Low	High
Barclays	4087.0	4087.0	Shell	1000.0	1000.0	NatWest	741.0	741.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	800.0	First Group	700.0	700.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	1010.5
BT	400.0	400.0	British Airways	300.0	300.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	200.0

Retailers, General

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Property

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Support Services

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Water

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Rights Issues

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Recent Issues

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Telecommunications

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Textiles & Apparel

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Government Securities

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Medicines

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Longs

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Shorts

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Undated

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Chemicals

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Engineering

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

Food

Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change	Stock	Price	Change
Barclays	4087.0	-0.5	Shell	1000.0	0.0	NatWest	741.0	0.0
Bank of Scotland	800.0	0.0	First Group	700.0	0.0	British Petroleum	1010.5	0.0
BT	400.0	0.0	British Airways	300.0	0.0	Virgin Atlantic	200.0	0.0

business

BZW chief needs to produce results fast

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

Boom market conditions are leading to record bonuses. That in turn has meant such a rapid escalation in costs that shareholders have found it difficult to benefit from the boom in markets.

According to a recent stock exchange report: "As staff costs are by far the largest single cost element and overall revenue is highly sensitive to changes in dealing profit, the implication is that benign market conditions will easily reduce member firms' profit levels."

The Stock Exchange said that staff costs increased significantly during the year to June 1996. While its figures are confined to equities, equities derivatives, bonds and money market instruments, observers believe that representative of investment banking more generally.

After remaining flat the previous year, staff costs among the exchange's 250 member firms grew by nine percent to an average £362m per quarter. Bonuses and profit sharing soared by almost £100m to a record £315m and profits were at a record £719m.

But, significantly for the shareholders of these firms, return on capital failed to match this vibrant performance. The average return on capital did rise to above its long-term average - a mere six per cent - but at just 10 per cent, the return is still poor by most standards.

"Despite the recent favourable market conditions, the modest return over the past years would be lower still if the firms in aggregate had not reduced the amount of capital employed," the Stock Exchange said.

In the first part of 1996 the Stock Exchange said firms were able to cut back on the amount of capital they set aside to cover their business because of a new directive from Europe, the Capital Adequacy Directive, and

because of restructuring in the industry.

Some investment bankers are eager to counter this claim, arguing that banks and securities houses tend towards caution when it comes to setting aside capital. "We set aside more than is required," said one banker.

This hides the true return on equity, he argues. "It could be the return on equity masks the true success of investment banking business because the

Investment banks' return on capital is still poor by most standards

firms want to be cautious about the amount of capital they set aside even though they have better technology to measure the amount of capital required," said another banker.

He said banks typically used sophisticated measuring tools known as Value at Risk (VaR) to determine the amount of capital they need to cover volatility in the markets. This regularly leads to banks setting aside more capital than regulators require, he said.

Many see this as little more than another excuse for poor

returns. "Risk management may explain high capital needs and consequent poor returns but it does not excuse them or make this the type of business you would want to invest in," said one City investor.

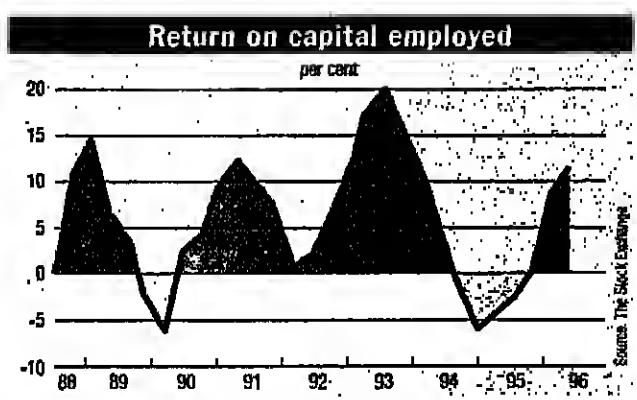
One analyst pointed to data which showed that as banks moved further into investment banking they gave a lower and lower share of their returns to their shareholders compared with staff.

In ordinary banking, according to this analyst, only 60 per cent of any excess profit tends to end up with staff. As the bank pushes into investment banking, he said citing recent examples, that proportion quickly rises to 85 per cent or more.

Influential research by McKinsey, the management consultancy firm, concludes that employees of investment banks always do better than shareholders, regardless of market conditions.

"While compensation has risen steadily over the years, volatility in business performance has been absorbed by the shareholders," McKinsey said in its research.

From analysis of the top 10 US investment banks, McKinsey calculates that employees maintained high returns throughout the period from 1980 to 1994, despite a steadily falling return to shareholders. This was even the case in 1994 when the return for shareholders turned negative.



Comeback by former Pearson blue-blood

PEOPLE & BUSINESS

James Joll, the blue-blooded quintessence of the old-guard at Pearson until his retirement before Christmas, has popped up as non-executive chairman of AIB Asset Management Holdings, which bought John Govett a year ago.

The Irish banking group is clearly hoping that Govett's fund management expertise will give it critical mass in that area, as John Govett will take the lead managing the £12bn portfolio.

The Honourable Kevin Pakenham, chief executive of John Govett, becomes chief executive of the asset management company. Most of the group's products will be Govett-branded.

Eton and Oxbridge-educated, Mr Joll remains a non-executive director of Equitas, the Lloyd's of London rescue vehicle, as well as Economist Newspapers. He has given up his non-executive directorship of Lazard Brothers, the merchant bank part-owned by Pearson.

Mr Joll was originally a journalist, working on the Financial Times's Lex Column, so I expect that he will not be slow in telling AIB how the operation should be run.

Razor-sharp City folk who think they know their Francis Pienar from their Piont Noir can put their brain power to the test to help Marie Curie Cancer Care - the UK's biggest cancer charity.

Brain entries are now being taken for the annual Marie Curie Brain Game, which takes place at the London South Bank Studios on 6 March, with the BBC's Martyn Lewis as quizmaster.

The Brain Game is now in its seventh year and has so far raised more than £470,000 to help people with cancer.

Anyone wishing to enter a team should call Penny Wheeler on 0171 201 2396. Champagne, dinner and wine are included in the



New role: James Joll is to be non-executive chairman of AIB Asset Management

ticket price - but you will have to supply your own IQ.

Just as GEC's chairman for 33 years, Lord Weststock, has retired, the company's deputy managing director of the last 12 years, Malcolm Bates, has also left for pastures new.

Mr Bates, 62, has been appointed non-executive chairman of Premier Farnell, the Anglo-American electronic components distributor.

George Simpson who replaced Lord Weststock as GEC's chairman is under-

stood to have good relations with Mr Bates, so it doesn't look like a post-Weststock clear-out.

Mr Bates's predecessor, Richard Hanwell, announced his intention to leave Premier last summer after spending five years there, and Premier was prepared to wait until the right replacement came along.

Howard Poulson, Premier's chief executive, says: "He's exactly what we were looking for. He comes from a fairly large organisation, and we're growing. He is re-

spected in the City, and he has international experience (in the US and Asia). He's also had spells in government and a merchant bank."

Before joining GEC Mr Bates was joint managing director at Grindley Brandt ANZ Merchant Bank, after serving two years with the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation.

He is a keen classical music buff, so no doubt he is relieved that he will not be forced to move to Premier's head office in Wetherby, Yorkshire, where concert

halls are rather thinner on the ground than his present home, London.

Tim Eggar, former Energy Minister, has picked up a second plum job just six months after resigning from the Government.

Yesterday Monument Oil & Gas said Mr Eggar, who remains MP for Enfield North until the general election, will join the company's board as a non-executive director.

Just three months ago Mr Eggar caused a stir when he was appointed chairman of MW Kellogg, an oil services company and the UK wing of the American engineering and construction subsidiary of Dresser Industries.

He was believed to have been offered a salary of around £150,000 a year.

A spokesman for Monument is keen to point out that Mr Eggar's more recent appointment isn't just about going for the money. "Mr Eggar and Monument's chief executive Thyn Craven Walker go back some way."

Indeed they do. Before Mr Eggar, now 45, went into politics he worked for an investment banking boutique and was non-executive director of Charterhouse Petroleum - the oil company Mr Craven Walker ran before he set up Monument in 1988.

At Monument Mr Eggar will "have particular responsibilities relating to the development of Monument's expanding overseas activities, including the important Caspian Sea region where Monument is already operating a large concession containing existing oil and gas fields in Western Turkmenistan," says Monument.

Monument has decided not to bid in the latest license round for UK offshore exploration, specifically to avoid any possible conflict of interest with Mr Eggar's recent post as Energy Minister. Who says ethics are dead?

John Willcock

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Spot	1 month	3 months
US	1.6942	12.10	38.36
Canada	2.2886	54.45	164.56
Germany	2.6894	89.61	235.93
France	5.0039	217.98	640.08
Italy	2.0983	31.45	103.23
Japan	126.71	95.61	229.26
ECU	1.7339	21.18	66.61
Belgium	5.6103	55.10	163.32
Denmark	12.7227	122.17	355.54
Netherlands	2.2968	62.74	240.22
Norway	1.0188	5.10	16.30
Spain	2.2431	5.13	16.30
Sweden	1.7321	20.10	63.90
Switzerland	2.1307	15.90	50.90
Australia	2.2791	11.15	35.25
Hong Kong	3.1307	93.86	280.83
Malaysia	4.2315	0.0	0.0
New Zealand	2.2998	64.71	155.69
Saudi Arabia	6.3534	0.0	0.0
Singapore	2.3912	0.0	0.0

Other Spot Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	1.6943	0.9959
Australia	1.7321	1.0055
Brazil	1.7321	1.0055
Canada	1.6943	0.9959
China	5.1767	3.4051
France	4.2315	2.7410
Germany	2.2998	1.4720
Greece	1.7321	1.0055
India	0.1771	0.1125
Kuwait	0.0085	0.0001

Forward rates quoted high to low are at a discount; rates quoted low to high are at a premium. "Dollar rates quoted as reciprocals. For the latest foreign exchange rates call 0891 123 3033. Calls cost 50p per minute (day rates) 45p other times.

Interest Rates

Country	Base	Deposit	Discount
UK	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
France	10.00%	8.00%	4.50%
Germany	10.00%	8.00%	4.50%
Italy	10.00%	8.00%	4.50%
Japan	5.00%	4.00%	1.00%
Spain	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
Sweden	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
Switzerland	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
Denmark	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
Netherlands	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
Norway	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
Belgium	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
Australia	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
Canada	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%
USA	8.00%	6.00%	2.50%

Bond Yields

Country	5yr	10yr	15yr	20yr
UK	7.24	7.16	7.05	6.94
France	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Germany	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Italy	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Japan	5.17	5.08	4.97	4.86
Spain	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Sweden	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Switzerland	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Denmark	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Netherlands	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Norway	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Belgium	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Australia	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
Canada	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94
USA	8.25	8.16	8.05	7.94

Money Market Rates

Country	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year
UK	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
France	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%
Germany	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%
Italy	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%
Japan	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
Spain	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Sweden	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Switzerland	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Denmark	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Netherlands	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Norway	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Belgium	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Australia	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Canada	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
USA	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%

Tourist Rates

Stock	Sell
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New car fires Hill's optimism and ambition

Motor racing
DERICK ALLSOP

He marched into the hall a mile starchy behind a brass band and stood unsteadily beneath the explosion of bangers and sparklers, before completing the rehearsed ritual by declaring, "something's missing," from his new car. At which point the offending cover was peeled away to reveal the world champion No 1.

Damon Hill and his new car, the TWR Arrows-Yamaha, were on public display for the first time at the Autosport International Show at the NEC.

Birmingham, and he duly made all the other noises required on these occasions.

Optimism continued to shower the stage long after the firecrackers were spent, and Hill lit up his little speech about "state of the art machinery" by describing it as a "very little number," which excited him.

Hill's world has been in a state of excitement since his title success with Williams and he is understandably eager to get down to work. It remains to be seen whether reality will be as stimulating.

Arrows have yet to win a grand prix and, even with the leadership of Tom Walkinshaw,

the much vaunted introduction of Bridgestone tyres, the Premier Division of Formula One remains an exclusive club and extremely difficult to penetrate.

Unadorned, driver and boss talked of potential, podium finishes and the possibility of victories before the end of the coming season, but away from the pomp and ceremony, Hill was circumspect.

The 36-year-old Englishman, who will be partnered by Brazil's Pedro Diniz, said: "I think it would be remarkable to win a race this year and I'm not expecting it to happen. I'm just hoping it might."

"It's not impossible, but

there's no way I'm going to enjoy the level of success I had last season. This is going to be a very different experience for me, a very rude awakening. I won't have a clear road ahead of me."

Work on the car was held up for a month to accommodate Hill's long legs and famously big feet. Walkinshaw said: "I didn't realise he had size 11½. But it was worth the effort and investment to make him comfortable."

Hill confirmed: "It fits like a glove." He said also: "I'll be glad when all the talking is over. I saw the finished car for the first time at 12.30 last night and it looks

very neat. But it's only when we get to work that we'll know how good it is."

Hill and his team have just two months to prepare their "sexy little number" for the opening performance in Melbourne on 9 March. The first test, scheduled for Silverstone today, has been put back to next midweek because of the weather, and then the revamped team heads for Jerez and serious work.

Walkinshaw maintains that the combination of Hill's pace and experience, and the potential of Bridgestone, make "pulling off one or two wins," the realistic objective. "Damon is one of the two fastest drivers

in the world," he said. "I'm not dreaming."

He did, however, concede: "The honeymoon is over. The first six months are going to be very hard. When I took over Benetton it was a shambles so I am under no illusion as to the amount of effort required. This was worse by a country mile. But we made Benetton a good and competitive team, and that is our aim here."

While Hill has a job and a season to look forward to, his compatriot Martin Brundle must contemplate alternative employment. He has lost his place at Jordan-Peugeot to Giancarlo Fisichella, the 23-year-

old Italian, who will partner Ralf Schumacher, the two-time world champion's brother.

Brundle, 37, insists that decision does not mean the end of his racing career, defiantly urging: "Don't write me off."

In the meantime he may have to settle for a consultancy and testing package and commencing with ITV.

Brundle has been busy advising on modifications to the Silverstone circuit, and promises the slow complex has been turned into a flowing driving test. Silverstone's grand prix track has been resurfaced using laser beam equipment, in their latest £2m improvement scheme.

Lindsay in strong field for Tote post

Rugby League
DAVE HADFIELD

The game's chief executive, Maurice Lindsay, may switch horses to his other great sporting love, The *Racing Post*, has named Lindsay, in charge of rugby league since 1992, as a runner for the position of chairman of the Tote - a £75,000 per annum job that will be vacated by Lord Wyatt in April.

He is said to have been interviewed for the post although he can be considered an outsider in a field which includes two lords, two knights - one of them a Tory MP - and the former boss of the hugely successful Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club.

Lindsay's own racing credentials are more modest. He has held bookmaking interests since 1975 - indeed, he has faced recurring criticism in rugby league over his reluctance to give up those interests - and has had a share in various horses.

In rugby league, he made his name as the vice-chairman and then chairman of Wigan, taking most of the credit for transforming them from comatose giants to the most successful club in the world.

He has found his four years in charge of the British game as a whole a more intractable proposition. Lindsay has courted controversy at home and abroad by brokering the £87m deal with Rupert Murdoch that created Super League and summer rugby.

Lindsay has recently seen his power base compromised by the desire of the 12 Super League clubs for greater autonomy. They appointed their own chief executive, the former Daily Mirror managing editor, Colin Myler, at the end of last year.

In a brief statement yesterday he argued that being linked with the Tote chairmanship was a compliment to rugby league.

McCullough in the line of John L Sullivan

Harry Mullan reports from Boston on a world title fight for a popular Irishman

Wayne McCullough is assured of a warm welcome when he dips through the ropes in Boston tomorrow night to challenge Mexican veteran Daniel Zaragoza for the World Boxing Council super-bantamweight title.

This city has always cherished its Irish fighters, and the man from the Shankhill Road is merely the latest in a long line which starts with John L Sullivan and embraces an assortment of Celtic heroes from Jim Maloney, who had three heavyweight blood-curdlers with Jack Sharkey in 1924-25, to Kevin Finnegan, who twice battled Marvin Hagler in 1978. And, of course, there was the most successful exile of all -

The Evander Holyfield-Mike Tyson World Boxing Association heavyweight title re-match could be staged as early as April, according to promoter Don King. But dates in May and June are also on King's agenda for what will undoubtedly prove to be the richest fight in boxing history.

Dublin Steve Collins, who learnt his trade in Hagler's gym so well that he subsequently won two World Boxing Organisation titles.

But Sullivan, the old roistering hard case, remains the definitive fighting Irishman, even though it is close to a century since his last contest. Boston was his home town, as it was for so many of the sons and daughters of the emigrants who fled the Great Hunger, and the town still echoes with his footsteps.

Boston was designed for handsome cabs and pedestrians, and it is still possible to retrace Sullivan's steps along Concord Street, where he first went to school, or to the Dudley Street Opera House where he found his true vocation on the night when he went on stage in response to a challenge from a touring brawler called Scannel and, donning gloves for the first time, knocked the unfortunate pug into the orchestra pit.

Sullivan's mother had ecclesiastical ambitions for the boy, but dreams of a dog collar were quickly crushed by John's im-

mediate success in the ring. After beating the Tipperary man Paddy Ryan to become harem-kick champion of the world, Sullivan cashed in on his popularity by opening up his own saloon. He made a mortal enemy of Queen Victoria by inviting her son Bertie, the Prince of Wales, to "look me up any time you are in Boston and I'll see you are treated right".

Sullivan's excesses were eventually curbed by his second wife, Kate Harkin. He renounced the drink so enthusiastically that he was much in demand as a temperance lecturer but the reformation came too late: he was already afflicted with the sclerosis which killed him in 1918. James J Corbett, who had taken his title in the first gloved championship fight, wept at his funeral.

Kevin Finnegan, London-born of Irish parents, had a gory evening here in 1978 when he took on Hagler in the Boston Garden. Hagler, a frightening shaven-skulled black man, was loathed by the essentially racist Boston establishment. Finnegan, always cut prone, sustained the worst wound of his career in the early rounds, a split on the cheekbone which required almost 50 stitches to close.

"It felt as if I had been hit with an axe," he told me at the time. But being the battler he was, he fought on for round after round, until finally at the end of the sixth, he spotted from the corner of his one functioning eye the Commission doctor climbing the ring steps to inspect the injury.

Kevin composed what remained of his face into an appropriate expression of disappointment and indignation, fully expecting the doctor to say, "Sorry Finnegan the cut's too bad the fight's over". Instead he leaned over and muttered in Finnegan's ear: "Kevin you can lick this son of a bitch. Give it one more round."

When the blood starts flowing tomorrow night, as it assuredly will given Zaragoza's gory history, the Mexican need not expect such encouragement against an Irish opponent.

Tables for one with a potential feast on the menu



Warming up for a trip to the Crucible: Challengers in the qualifying tournament for the Embassy World Snooker Championship, which starts in April in Sheffield, make their final preparations in the practice area at the Norbeck Castle, Blackpool, yesterday. On the other side of the partition, a man who went right to the top of

the snooker world in his heyday, Alex Higgins, was belying his "Hurricane" sobriquet by grinding out a 6-3 advantage over Darren Limburg in his best-of-19-frames first-round match. The former world champion produced only one break over 30 - a run of 47 - and took 3hr 17min in building his lead in the opening session. Photograph: Peter Jay

Students achieve lift-off at Apollo Week

Andy Farrell reports from Valderama on a golf education for life on tour

As an introduction to life on the European Tour, the Apollo Week Training School is unrepresentative in one regard. It is an all-expenses-paid trip and that will not happen again to the 27 graduates of the Challenge Tour and the Qualifying School until they make the Ryder Cup team or become such a superstar that they do not get out of bed without the lure of substantial appearance money.

The first-class treatment has included staying at San Roque, where both the European and American teams will stay when the Ryder Cup is played at neighbouring Valderama in September. Given the incessant rain on the Costa del Sol, the only major expense has been that incurred at the bar.

Dedicated practice range ball-beaters the class of '97 may be, but they still enjoy a drink. This is not like the old days, though. "There are not as

many guys still at the bar at midnight," Joe Higgins said. At 37, Higgins is almost old enough to be a father to some of the younger tour newcomers.

In less than grand days, Higgins travelled the tour in a caravan with the likes of Ian Woosnam. His most financially successful year was 1989, when he won £19,972, but it was also the year he lost his tour card for good. A chance meeting with tour player David Williams rekindled his enthusiasm for the tournament scene and a high placing on the PGA national order of merit meant he was exempt for the Qualifying School.

He overcame that hurdle but has not given up the day job of being a consultant psychologist, physiotherapist and fitness expert. "The good thing is you can do as much or as little as you want. You can listen to too many people," Higgins said.

Carl Watts, a 25-year-old

from Shropshire, brought his coach along too. "He is helping me to pick out the right things for my game," said Watts, an organised young man who has kept a daily diary for future reference.

The Apollo Week has been an eye-opener for Higgins. "Even if you have been a pro for a long time, and I have been one for 21 years, you have missed out if you have not been here."

Higgins said. There is the chance to work with top coaches John Jacobs, Tommy Horton, Denis Pugh and putting specialist Harold Swash as well as consultant psychologists, physiotherapists and fitness experts. "The good thing is you can do as much or as little as you want. You can listen to too many people," Higgins said.

Carl Watts, a 25-year-old

father is a London cabbie who is both Wall's caddy and coach. "Dad has been teaching me since I was four," said the 21-year-old from Sunningdale.

"We talked a lot about whether he should come out on tour with me but I think it is the right thing to do. If I'm doing badly, it will be nice to have a friendly face around."

"This is what we have worked hard to achieve for the last 10 years. He has given up a lot. He always said he would caddy for me in my first year on tour."

Wall is a former winner of the Sunningdale Foursomes, when his partner was Steve Webster, whose father makes the cabs that Wall's dad drives. Webster was the star pupil a year ago. The leading amateur at the 1995 Open, he topped the Qualifying School and then won the Apollo Challenge. The success was short-lived and he missed the cut in his first nine

tournaments. Webster had to renew his card at the School and on Tuesday retained his Apollo title in wretched conditions at Valderama, shooting a two-under 69 to win by three.

"I have always been a very positive player, but I lost confidence last year," he said. "You have to pace yourself on tour; playing nine events in a row is too many. You can get lost on tour playing with your idols each week. The year before I was playing only country golf. I have had a year's experience and maybe it was a good thing to miss my card. I am more positive this year."

■ Ian Baker-Finch made a miserable return with a five-over-par 77 in the first round of the Victorian Open in Melbourne yesterday. Baker-Finch, who took six months away from tournament play after a succession of poor results in recent years, is 13 shots behind the leader, Stephen Leamy.

SPORTING DIGEST

Athletics

Jackie Joyner-Kersey, the American heptathlete, is to abandon her basketball career to return to the track, beginning with the Millrose Games on 7 February.

Basketball

WBA Boston 107, San Antonio 83; Cleveland 76, Houston 82; Philadelphia 93, Dallas 115; Miami 115, Phoenix 113; Denver 99, Seattle 108.

Today's fixtures

7.45 unless stated

Nationalwide Football League

First Division

Blackburn v Birmingham

League of Wales: Inter Celtic (Tel) v Bolton

Trevelin 17.30; Newport v Llanfair (7.30)

FBI Harp Lager Cup First round: St

Panick's 19th v Athlon Town; Shelbourne v Ev-

eragh AFC; Waterford v Monaghan United.

Basketball

BWWS League: Newcastle Eagles v

Manchester Gulls (7.30); Bute London

Towers v Leicester Riders (8.0).

Other sports

BMX: Embassy World Championship (Frm-)

ty Green, Surrey).

Table Tennis: English Open (Nettering).

Baseball

Milwaukee 119, Utah 112; Portland 81, Miami 85;

Oakland 96, Boston 95; Vancouver 109, LA Lakers 103;

Oregon 97.

Bowling League

Oxford Palace 75, Sheffield 75; Sheffield

Sharks 81.

Boxing

EUROPEAN LEAGUE: Second preliminary

round: Group F: Usher (Ire) 127, Gabor (Zar-)

ago 100; 12, Group G: Dyma (Moscow) 88,

Parashchikov (Uz) 81.

Bobsleigh

BETWEEN TWO-MAN CHAMPIONSHIPS (Winnipeg,

Man): Gary McEwen 2, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; and

Wing (U) 1.54; 2, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 3, Cui (S)

1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 4, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54;

5, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 6, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I)

1.54; 7, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 8, Cui (S) 1.54,

Olson (I) 1.54; 9, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 10, Cui (S)

1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 11, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54;

12, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 13, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I)

1.54; 14, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 15, Cui (S) 1.54,

Olson (I) 1.54; 16, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 17, Cui (S)

1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 18, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54;

19, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 20, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I)

1.54; 21, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 22, Cui (S) 1.54,

Olson (I) 1.54; 23, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 24, Cui (S)

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1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 32, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54;

33, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 34, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I)

1.54; 35, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 36, Cui (S) 1.54,

Olson (I) 1.54; 37, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 38, Cui (S)

1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 39, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54;

40, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 41, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I)

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Olson (I) 1.54; 51, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 52, Cui (S)

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54, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 55, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I)

1.54; 56, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 57, Cui (S) 1.54,

Olson (I) 1.54; 58, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 59, Cui (S)

1.54, Olson (I) 1.54; 60, Cui (S) 1.54, Olson (I) 1.54;

Baseball

Neal Fairbrother hammered 62 to steer

Lancashire to 235 for 8.

Derbyshire have signed the former

Lancashire and Somerset all-rounder

Steve Clarke. The 25-year-old had one

year with Somerset before spending two

seasons at Lancashire, although he

did not figure in their Championship-winning

side last summer.

SHARPLEY SHELLEY (first day of four) Sydney

Western Australia 180 for 11, A. B. 8; 10, 10; 11, 10; 12, 10; 13, 10; 14, 10; 15, 10; 16, 10; 17, 10; 18, 10; 19, 10; 20, 10; 21, 10; 22, 10; 23, 10; 24, 10; 25, 10; 26, 10; 27, 10; 28, 10; 29, 10; 30, 10; 31, 10; 32, 10; 33, 10; 34, 10; 35, 10; 36, 10; 37, 10; 38, 10; 39, 10; 40, 10; 41, 10; 42, 10; 43, 10; 44, 10; 45, 10; 46, 10; 47, 10; 48, 10; 49, 10; 50, 10; 51, 10; 52, 10; 53, 10; 54, 10; 55, 10; 56, 10; 57, 10; 58, 10; 59, 10; 60, 10; 61, 10; 62, 10; 63, 10; 64, 10; 65, 10; 66, 10; 67, 10; 68, 10; 69, 10; 70, 10; 71, 10; 72, 10; 73, 10; 74, 10; 75, 10; 76, 10; 77, 10; 78, 10; 79, 10; 80, 10; 81, 10; 82, 10; 83, 10; 84, 10; 85, 10; 86, 10; 87, 10; 88, 10; 89, 10; 90, 10; 91, 10; 92, 10; 93, 10; 94, 10; 95, 10; 96, 10; 97, 10; 98, 10; 99, 10; 100, 10; 101, 10; 102, 10; 103, 10; 104, 10; 105, 10; 106, 10; 107, 10; 108, 10; 109, 10; 110, 10; 111, 10; 112, 10; 113, 10; 114, 10; 115, 10; 116, 10; 117, 10; 118, 10; 119, 10; 120, 10; 121, 10; 122, 10; 123, 10; 124, 10; 125, 10; 126, 10; 127, 10; 128, 10; 129, 10; 130, 10; 131, 10; 132, 10; 133, 10; 134, 10; 135, 10; 136, 10; 137, 10; 138, 10; 139, 10; 140, 10; 141, 10; 142, 10; 143, 10; 144, 10; 145, 10; 146, 10; 147, 10; 148, 10; 149, 10; 150, 10; 151, 10; 152, 10; 153, 10; 154, 10; 155, 10; 156, 10; 157, 10; 158, 10; 159, 10; 160, 10; 161, 10; 162, 10; 163, 10; 164, 10; 165, 10; 166, 10; 167, 10; 168, 10; 169, 10; 170, 10; 171, 10; 172, 10; 173, 10; 174, 10; 175, 10; 176, 10; 177, 10; 178, 10; 179, 10; 180, 10; 181, 10; 182, 10; 183, 10; 184, 10; 185, 10; 186, 10; 187, 10; 188, 10; 189, 10; 190, 10; 191, 10; 192, 10; 193, 10; 194, 10; 195, 10; 196, 10; 197, 10; 198, 10; 199, 10; 200, 10; 201, 10; 202, 10; 203, 10; 204, 10; 205, 10; 206, 10; 207, 10; 208, 10; 209, 10; 210, 10; 211, 10; 212, 10; 213, 10; 214, 10; 215, 10; 216, 10; 217, 10; 218, 10;

New face for '97

Emile Heskey has the world
at his feet says Phil Shaw, page 28

sport

Irish challenge

Harry Mullan on Wayne McCullough's
world title pursuit in Boston, page 29

Punters back Robson and Beardsley

Football
ALAN NIXON

Bobbi Robson has joined Kenny Dalglish in the jostle to become manager of Newcastle United, following the sudden resignation of Kevin Keegan. The 63-year-old former England manager, now coaching Barcelona, yesterday emerged as a leading contender in a package with the Newcastle captain, Peter Beardsley, as his assistant and eventual successor. One

leading bookmaker was forced to close his books on Beardsley after a flurry of bets.

Robson is finding the going tough in his first season at Barcelona where the pressure to win the title is even greater than at Newcastle. The chance to return to his native North-east for one last hurrah before he retires has his appeal.

A Robson-Beardsley partnership has some credence. The pair worked well together for England and have remained friends. Against the proposal is

Robson's length of time out of English club football, a stretch of 15 years, and Beardsley's inexperience.

Rumours are such on Tyne-side that Newcastle representatives were reportedly in Spain talking to Robson yesterday. However, a Barcelona spokesman, Jose Miguel Peres, said: "Mr Robson is manager of Barcelona and he will stay at the club for the next two years of his contract. We are not expecting any changes."

Elsewhere, the Newcastle chairman, Sir John Hall, who has been in Spain on holiday since the new year, was said to be meeting John Toshack, another exile in charge of Deportivo La Coruña, in Marbella. The 47-year-old Toshack, whose contract expires in June, denied he was speaking to anyone.

Dalglish's cause is being pushed by his allies, headed by his former Liverpool team-mate, Alan Hansen. "This should not be a time of mourning in Newcastle," he said. "If they get Kenny as manager he will win them trophies." When Hansen speaks about his friend it is normally with his approval.

The speed of Keegan's exit has thrown everyone. Dalglish has just started work for the Rangers chairman, David Murray, in PR, but his credentials – championships as manager with Liverpool and Blackburn – remain better than any of his rivals for the post.

Backing for Beardsley's elevation saw William Hill cut his price from 14-1 before closing their book. One punter placed £1,000 at 8-1, Graham Sharpe, a Hills spokesman, said: "We are of the opinion that there are now certain people out there who know more than we do."

Graham goes Dutch to stiffen defence

RUPERT METCALF

George Graham, like most of his Premiership colleagues, has had to look abroad to strengthen his squad. The Leeds United manager yesterday paid the Dutch club Volendam £1m for their 6ft 3in 27-year-old centre-half, Robert Molenaar.

It is only Graham's second signing since replacing Howard Wilkinson at Elland Road – he bought the Norwegian defender Gunnar Halle for £600,000 from Oldham last month. "He [Molenaar] can play as a sweeper or a marker," Graham said. "He has a couple of coaching badges, so he can understand different systems."

Alex Ferguson, the Manchester United manager, has dismissed speculation linking him with a move for the Real Madrid strikers, Davor Suker and Predrag Mijatovic, claiming the rumours were started by the

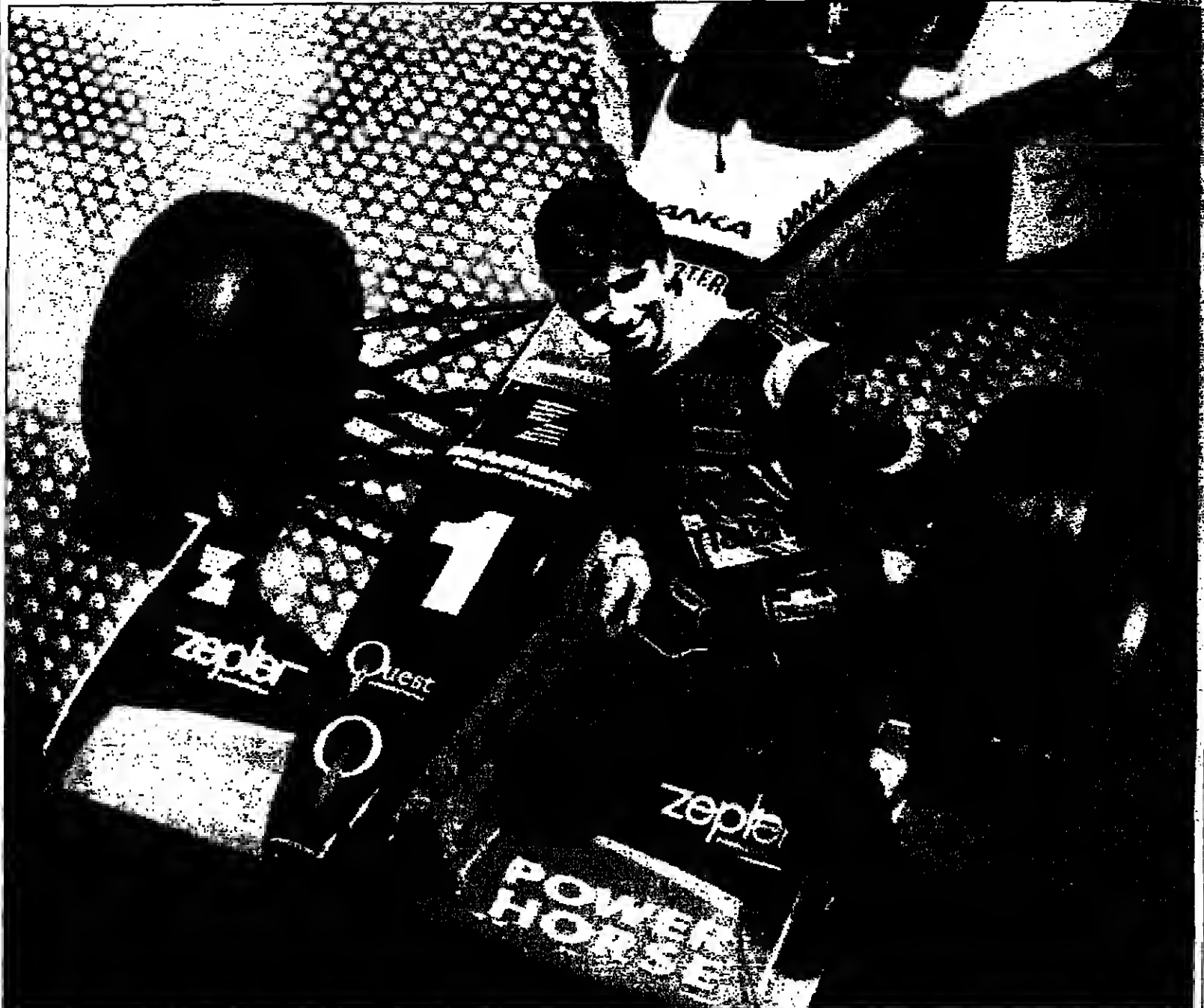
players' agents in order to raise their clients' value.

Ferguson is keen on the Real defender Fernando Hierro. He told a Spanish newspaper: "He's a player that we like a lot for his flexibility and character on the field. The only problem is that Real don't want to sell him." Real Madrid are signing the Milan full-back Christian Panucci for around £3m.

David May will play for Manchester United at Tottenham on Sunday after a hernia operation, due this week, was delayed. Two players who did have hernia operations yesterday and will be out for at least a month were Aston Villa's Mark Draper and Derby's Igor Stimac.

West Ham have completed the sale of their Romanian international midfielder Ilie Dumitrescu to the Mexican club, America, for £1m. Manchester City have sold their German full-back Michael Frontzeck to Freiburg for £250,000.

Beauty in the eye of world title holder



Thinking of No 1: Damon Hill poses beside the brand-new TWR Arrows-Yamaha which bears the world champion's number at its unveiling at the Autosport International Show at the National Exhibition Centre, in Birmingham, yesterday

Photograph: David Ashdown

Ashton takes Irish coaching post

Rugby Union
CHRIS HEWITT

The mere thought of being asked to help England chart a course through the choppy waters of the Five Nations Championship is clearly enough to make strong men go weak at the knees. Less than 24 hours after Jack Rowell, the national coach, threatened Brian Ashton, an old comrade from his days at Bath, with a place in his Twickenham think tank, Ashton yesterday accepted a post as Ireland's coaching adviser.

A year ago, the idea that it might be easier to squeeze the best out of Ireland rather than their big-island neighbours would have been laughable, but England's performance against Argentina last month – and particularly that of their back division, for whom Ashton

would have taken considerable responsibility had Rowell managed to beat the Irish to his services – changed all that.

Ashton severed his seven-year association with Bath on Monday after a prolonged dispute with the club's new management board; poorly paid in comparison to even the lesser lights on the playing staff, he was even more frustrated by his lack of influence on a wide range of rugby issues. That is not a problem he is likely to face with the Irish who hadly need an inventive tactical thinker to restore credibility and confidence after their embarrassing 37-29 defeat against Italy in Dublin last weekend.

The resignation of the New Zealander, Murray Kidd, left the way clear for Ashton's appointment. Although he has agreed only a short-term deal to cover the forthcoming championship, it is

perfectly possible that the 49-year-old schoolmaster from Lancashire will be asked to lay the foundations for Ireland's World Cup campaign in two years' time.

"I'm delighted that this has come about," he said yesterday. "For a start, it was important to find myself a job. I have family responsibilities to think about and having resigned my post at Bath, I was as worried about the future as any other unemployed person. People kept telling me it wouldn't be long before something turned up and they have been proved right, but it was still of deep concern to me."

"This is a big task – an opening international against the French in eight days' time is not the easiest of starts – but I am absolutely enthralled at the prospect. As I understand it I'll be involved in selection, although I must admit that I'll be fairly passive in that role for a

little while because I know so little about the players concerned. I haven't kept in close touch with Irish rugby in the past and while I've run the rule over some of their players in a club context, it has always been to work out ways of helping them fulfil their potential.

"I think the Irish could do with some sorting out behind the scenes, but there is no shortage of talent in the country. They have been very useful indeed at Under-21 and Under-19 level of late and I see it as part of my job to make sure those players develop into strong international performers."

The partnership between Ashton and Mike Brewer, the former All Black flanker who was working alongside Kidd until this week's outbreak of head-rolling, should give the Irish their soundest tactical base

in a generation. "I had a long conversation with Mike earlier this week and I must say that I have seldom struck such a chord with anyone," Ashton said.

Ireland's match against England in Dublin on 15 February now takes on a whole new perspective. Ashton's detailed knowledge of a back division likely to be dominated by Bath players makes Rowell's job all the more difficult. "I'm a patriotic Lancastrian and Englishman, so it will be odd to coach a team with the aim of beating my own country," he said. "But for the period of the Five Nations, I am as much as any Irishman in rugby matters."

As Jon Sleightholme, the England wing whose career blossomed under Ashton's tutelage at Bath, admitted yesterday: "I've always said that Bath's loss would be someone else's gain."

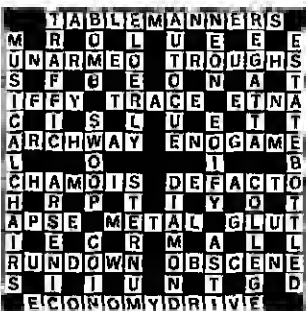
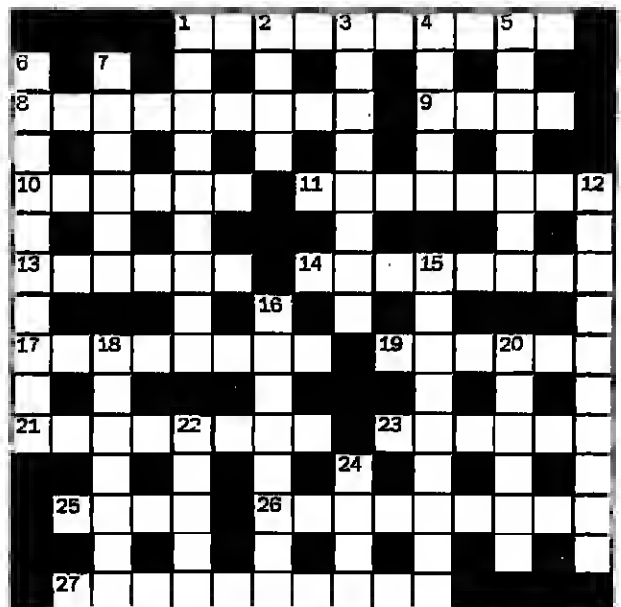
Moore banned, page 28

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3192, Friday 10 January

By Phil

Thursday's solution



ACROSS

- 1 Presumably the aristocracy get 'flu instead! (6, 4)
- 8 Vermineous creature brutally torn away after nipping toddler's extremity (6, 3)
- 9 Friend embracing upper-class man (4)
- 10 Arrivals favoured France and the light in old Italy (6)
- 11 Some precipitate soldiers in a parachute landing (8)
- 13 Consumption: a kilo in the middle of winter (6)
- 14 Badly-constructed lingo incomplete – word for "petrol container" needed (5, 3)
- 17 That man embraced by one novice is not a good example to follow (8)

DOWN

- 1 Hack a hunk off in preparing for this festival (9)
- 2 Extra choice for capital in Middle East (4)
- 3 Scots food – a Scot somehow devours fish, taking head off (8)

4 Chicken? It's roughly horse, mostly (5)

- 5 RA cult developed about European painter's name, in part (7)
- 6 Cow I had brought in close (10)
- 7 Favouring healthy gain (6)
- 12 Copper going round in fear, climbing hilly walk (7, 3)
- 15 A source so refined, like a flower (9)
- 16 Swathed women read about most of them (8)
- 18 Item of pedicure work enthralling girl (7)
- 20 A positive vote given to you? Yes (3, 3)
- 22 Superduper hiding-place for what's lost to view? (5)
- 24 Stone work on a cathedral's base (4)

Henman shows his pedigree in adversity

Tennis
DERRICK WHYTE
reports from Sydney

Tim Henman reached his second semi-final in less than a week when he recovered from a set down to beat American Alex O'Brien 1-6, 7-6, 6-4 in the Sydney International yesterday.

Once again the British No 1 showed his ability to play well in adversity. Having squandered a 5-2 lead, the second set went into a tie-break and at 3-1 down he appeared to be heading for defeat. But he reeled off the next six points to take the set.

It was the second match running that Henman had come back from losing the first set. On Tuesday he did the same thing in his success against Spain's Sergi Bruguera.

Afterwards Henman played down the effects of his hectic schedule. "I have played quite a few games in the last few weeks but I still feel full of energy. I am definitely feeling fitter and moving a lot better around the court," he said.

"I was mainly concerned with

preparations for the Australian Open which starts on Monday. I only hope I can continue with my form so far."

Henman now has to contend with the power serving of Goran Ivanisevic, who reached the semi-finals with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Australian wild-card entry Sandon Stolle. Ivanisevic, twice runner-up at Wimbledon, told reporters he was anxious to end the constant questions surrounding his failure to win one of the four Grand Slam titles.

"Then every time I come to the press conference, nobody has to ask me, 'When are you going to win a Grand Slam?'" he said.

In the women's event the American Jennifer Capriati had a 6-4, 6-1 win over her compatriot Amy Frazier. She will meet another American, the fourth-seeded Lindsay Davenport, in the semi-finals. Davenport beat Japan's Naoko Sawamatsu 6-3, 6-7, 6-1.

Martina Hingis set up the en-

tering prospect of a final with Capriati after beating Indonesia's Yayuk Basuki 7-6 6-1.

Michael Chang avenged his defeat by Boris Becker in last year's Australian Open final with a battling win in the Colonial Classic semi-finals in Melbourne. He beat the German 2-6, 6-4, 7-6, saving three match points in the process.

Three British players, Andrew Richardson, Mark Petchey and Jamie Delgado, all won their first-round matches in the qualifying competition for the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday.

Results, Australian Open seeds, Digest, page 29

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